

Icelandic Valency Classes: Oblique Subjects, Oblique Anticausatives and the Actional Passive

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1. Introduction

The present chapter gives an overview of valency classes in Icelandic and the most common, noticeable, or productive alternations found in the language. The overview is based on my own native-speaker knowledge of the language, on my earlier research and on the existing literature on Icelandic. Most of the examples are attested, taken from real texts found online, supplemented with some constructed examples.

The chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the basics of Icelandic by placing it into its genealogical, linguistic and social context. Section 3 deals with basic valency, focusing particularly on two- and three-place predicates in Icelandic. There I present an overview of which predicates may instantiate the different argument structure constructions: Nominative Subject Construction, Accusative Subject Construction, Dative Subject Construction, and the different subconstructions of ditransitives. Section 4 deals with uncoded alternations, i.e. alternations not coded on the verb. These are divided into three types, case variations, case and structure changing alternations, and structure changing alternations. Section 5 deals with coded alternations, i.e. alternations that are coded on the verb, such as the Active–Passive Alternation, the Impersonal Passive, the Intransitive–Inchoative, the Reflexive and the Mediopassive. In Section 6, additional alternations are discussed, namely the Oblique Anticausative, which is found with accusative, dative and genitive subjects, and the Actional Passive, which is an extension of the Impersonal Passive, found with transitive and ditransitive predicates. Section 7 concludes my discussion on alternations and valency classes in Icelandic.

2. Icelandic

The Icelandic language is the national language of Iceland. It is documented over the last millennium or so and the oldest texts consist of first Eddic poetry and then later of prose genres such as the Icelandic Sagas. The degree of literacy has always been high in Iceland, and the tale tells that Icelandic children were taught to read from the manuscripts. This, together with several other factors, has no doubt contributed to the keeping of the Icelandic language, as the similarities between Old and Modern Icelandic are great enough for the contemporary person to be able to read old texts.

The population of Icelandic speakers is quite small, or only approximately 320,000 at present. In spite of that, Icelandic is a fully functional language, being used in all social contexts, both informal and formal, including academia and state administration. At present approximately 2,000 book titles are published in Iceland every year and the number of printed copies is more than seven per inhabitant, which is among the highest in the world. Several Icelandic authors are also regularly translated into other languages.

Icelandic is a SVO and a V2 language. That is, the subject is in first position in neutral word order, followed by the predicate. When something else occurs in first position, topical or focused material, the subject inverts with the verb. Icelandic belongs to the North-Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family, and it has maintained several of the morphosyntactic properties typically found in the Indo-European languages like case marking and agreement, both subject-verb agreement but also agreement internal to the noun phrase.

Table 1: Noun Phrase Internal Agreement

	NOM SG		ACC SG	
Masc.	<i>gamall</i> old	<i>maður</i> man	<i>gamlan</i> old	<i>mann</i> man
Fem.	<i>gömul</i> old	<i>kona</i> woman	<i>gamla</i> old	<i>konu</i> woman
Neut.	<i>gamalt</i> old	<i>blað</i> paper	<i>gamalt</i> old	<i>blað</i> paper
	DAT SG		GEN SG	
Masc.	<i>gömlum</i> old	<i>manni</i> man	<i>gamals</i> old	<i>manns</i> man
Fem.	<i>gamalli</i> old	<i>konu</i> woman	<i>gamallar</i> old	<i>konu</i> woman
Neut.	<i>gömlu</i> old	<i>blaði</i> paper	<i>gamals</i> old	<i>blaðs</i> paper

As evident from Table 1, there are four morphological cases in Icelandic: nominative, accusative, dative and genitive, and case marking is found both on the head noun and its dependent adjective and other adjectival elements.

The predicate agrees with the nominative, be it a nominative subject or a nominative object, as shown in (1a–b) below:

- (1a) *Mennirnir keyptu hestana.*
men-the.NOM bought.3P.PL horses-the.ACC
'The men bought the book.'

- (1b) *Henni líkuðu mennirnir.*
she.DAT liked.3P.PL men-the.NOM
'She liked the men.'

Notice that the definite article in Icelandic is suffixed on the noun, and since it is originally a demonstrative pronoun, it also inflects for case, yielding double, and hence internal, case marking on Icelandic nouns in the definite form (cf. Barðdal 2001a: 12). This is found, for instance, on the object *hesta-na* 'book.ACC-the.ACC' in (1a) above.

Returning to agreement, 3rd person singular agreement is used for non-prototypical subjects, like oblique subjects, infinitival subjects, expletive subjects, etc., as is well known crosslinguistically (cf. Corbett 1991: 204):

- (2a) *Henni líkaði maturinn.*
she.DAT liked.3P.SG food-the.NOM
'She liked the food.'
- (2b) *Að finna til er eðlilegt.*
to hurt.INF to is.3P.SG. natural
'To feel hurt is a natural thing.'
- (2c) *Það er gott að elska.*
it.EXPL is.3P.SG. good to love.INF
'It is good to love.'

For this reason, it has become customary to speak of nominative-verb agreement in Icelandic and not subject-verb agreement (cf. Sigurðsson 1990–91, 1996, *inter alia*).

Table 2: The Internal Structure of the Noun Phrase

Ind.	Adj+Noun	<i>gamall maður</i> old man
Def.	Noun+Adj+Def	<i>gamli maðurinn</i> old man-the
Def	Def+Adj+Noun	<i>hinn gamli maður</i> the old man

The noun phrase is structured in such a way that adjectives usually precede nouns, as shown in Table 1 above, although adjectives may also follow nouns when the noun is definite, either through a free definite article which precedes the noun or through the afore-mentioned suffixed definite article (see Table 2). Structures with the free definite article, like at the bottom of Table 2, are regarded as formal, while structures with the suffixed definite article, like in the middle of Table 2, may be used in both formal and informal contexts. There is no indefinite article in Icelandic.

3. Basic Valency in Icelandic

Icelandic is generally regarded as a nominative–accusative language, although several case patterns deviating from the accusative prototype are found, like accusative subject predicates, dative subject predicates and genitive subject predicates. Within each of these categories there are subcategories, like Acc-only, Acc-Nom, Acc-Gen, etc., yielding a host of different case patterns, shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Basic Coding of In/Transitives in Icelandic

Nom	Acc	Dat	Gen
Nom-only	Acc-only	Dat-only	Gen-only
Nom-Acc	Acc-Nom	Dat-Nom	Gen-Nom
Nom-Dat	Acc-Acc		
Nom-Gen	Acc-Gen		
Nom-PP	Acc-PP	Dat-PP	Gen-PP
Nom-S	Acc-S	Dat-S	Gen-S

There is no doubt that the semantically most transitive predicates select for the nominative-subject pattern, while the accusative-, dative- and genitive-subject patterns are instantiated by predicates lower on the transitivity scale (cf. Barðdal 2004, 2011, Barðdal & Eythórsson 2009).

3.1 The Nominative Subject Construction

Within the nominative-subject pattern, the Nom-Acc is the most type-frequent one, while Nom-Dat is also considerably high in type frequency. The Nom-Gen pattern is instantiated by only a handful of predicates in Modern Icelandic. Cf. Table 4 from Barðdal (2008: 60):

Table 4: Type Frequency of the Subconstructions of the Nominative Subject Construction in Different Counts of Icelandic

	Dictionary Count		Corpus Count	
	N	%	N	%
Nom-Acc	1,381	64.1	303	58.8
Nom-Dat	738	34.2	188	36.5
Nom-Gen	37	1.7	24	4.7
Total	2,156	100.0	515	100.0

I have carried out an investigation of the lexical semantic verb classes instantiating the Nom-Acc, Nom-Dat and Nom-Gen constructions (Barðdal 2008: Ch. 3) and found both similarities and differences between them. The investigation is based on a small corpus of Modern Icelandic texts (cf. Barðdal 2001a), from which the statistics reported on in Table 4 originates. The corpus consists of approximately 40,000 running words, divided across six different genres, five written and one spoken genre, with ten texts in each of the written genres. As such, even though it is small, this is a well-stratified corpus, and should as such be a good representative of a cross section of the modern Icelandic language.

The analysis is based on fine-grained lexical semantic verb classes; the predicates instantiating the Nom-Acc construction may be divided into 46 narrowly-circumscribed verb classes, the predicates instantiating the Nom-Dat construction may be divided into 33 such classes, while the ones instantiating the Nom-Gen construction divide across five classes (Barðdal 2008: 63–76):

Nom-Acc

1. Verbs of appearing
2. Verbs of attaching and detaching
3. Verbs of attempting
4. Verbs of building and handicraft
5. Verbs of choosing and electing
6. Verbs of cognition and mental activity
7. Verbs of commencement
8. Verbs of creation and reshaping
9. Verbs of (means of) cutting
10. Verbs of decorating
11. Verbs of (de)limitation

Nom-Dat

1. Verbs of attendance and helping
2. Verbs of attributing
3. Verbs of comparison and equality
4. Verbs of compensating
5. Verbs of connection
6. Verbs of controlling
7. Verbs of (perceived) covertness and danger
8. Verbs of defending
9. Verbs of destruction
10. Verbs of division

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| 12. Verbs of delivering | 11. Verbs of (caused) emotion |
| 13. Verbs of destruction | 12. Verbs of ending and finishing |
| 14. Verbs of discussing | 13. Verbs of eyeing |
| 15. Verbs of displaying | 14. Verbs of greeting and welcoming |
| 16. Verbs of doing and producing | 15. Verbs of habitude |
| 17. Verbs of dwelling and stationary position | 16. Verbs of handling |
| 18. Verbs of (caused) emotion | 17. Verbs of increase |
| 19. Verbs of feeding and consumption | 18. Verbs of instructing |
| 20. Verbs of formal communication | 19. Verbs of losing |
| 21. Verbs of funding and finances | 20. Verbs of marrying |
| 22. Verbs of (means of) gaining | 21. Verbs of (caused) motion |
| 23. Verbs of heating and illumination | 22. Verbs of non-translational motion |
| 24. Verbs of human disposition | 23. Verbs of obeying |
| 25. Verbs of increasing and strengthening | 24. Verbs of obtaining and maintaining |
| 26. Verbs of letting | 25. Verbs of organizing |
| 27. Verbs of human manipulation | 26. Verbs of persistence and daring |
| 28. Verbs of measurement | 27. Verbs of puttering |
| 29. Verbs of meeting and uniting | 28. Verbs of readiness and equipment |
| 30. Verbs of non-translational motion | 29. Verbs of stealing |
| 31. Verbs of perception and arousal | 30. Verbs of thinking and meaning |
| 32. Verbs of (direct) physical affectedness | 31. Verbs of trusting |
| 33. Verbs of possession | 32. Verbs of (means of) verbal communication |
| 34. Verbs of practicing and attending | 33. Other miscellaneous verbs |
| 35. Verbs of preparing | |
| 36. Verbs of putting | Nom-Gen |
| 37. Verbs of recuperation | 1. Verbs of asking and wishing |
| 38. Verbs of slandering | 2. Verbs of cognition |
| 39. Verbs of taking and fetching | 3. Verbs of emotion |
| 40. Verbs of catching and termination | 4. Verbs of social influence |
| 41. Verbs of transfer | 5. Other miscellaneous verbs |
| 42. Verbs of translational motion and (means of) traveling | |
| 43. Verbs of utilizing | |
| 44. Verbs of (interactive) verbal behavior | |
| 45. Verbs of (verbal) creation | |
| 46. Verbs of warfare and heroism | |

Impressionistically, one can say that the predicate classes instantiating the Nom-Acc construction are more agentive or express a higher degree of affectedness than the predicate classes instantiating the Nom-Dat construction. The predicates instantiating the Nom-Dat construction, in turn, with the possible exception of the motion predicates (see Section 4.2 below), are often more typical for interpersonal communication and interaction. This is confirmed by an analysis of the animacy of typical objects of these predicates, given in Table 5, which shows that 45% of datives in Nom-Dat are animate, while similar figures for the accusative in Nom-Acc and the genitive in Nom-Gen are 26 vs. 21%, respectively.

Table 5: Animate vs. Inanimate Reference of the Object in Nominative Subject Constructions in Icelandic

	Inanimate object		Animate object		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Nom-Acc	225	74.2	78	25.8	303	100
Nom-Dat	103	54.8	85	45.2	188	100
Nom-Gen	19	79.2	5	20.8	24	100

3.2 The Oblique Subject Construction

There is also a major overlap between the Accusative Subject Construction and the Dative Subject Construction. This has resulted in a process where the Dative Subject Construction attracts predicates from the Accusative Subject Construction, as is further discussed in Section 4.1 below.

Starting with the Dative Subject Construction, the following narrowly-circumscribed verb classes are found instantiating it in Icelandic:

Verbs denoting Emotions:

1. Verbs of liking/being pleased
2. Verbs of dislike
3. Verbs of longing
4. Verbs of enjoyment/happiness
5. Verbs of feeling/experiencing
6. Verbs expressing fear/danger
7. Verbs denoting suffering/distress
8. Verbs expressing anger/irritation
9. Verbs of boredom/tiredness
10. Verbs expressing relieve/ease
11. Verbs expressing burden/load
12. Verbs of sorrow/sadness
13. Verbs of pain
14. Verbs of shame
15. Verbs of care
16. Verbs expressing hope/wish

Verbs of Perception:

17. Verbs of perception

Verbs of Gain:

18. Verbs of benefit
19. Verbs of growing

Verbs of Hindrance:

20. Verbs of hindrance
21. Verbs of dying

Verbs of Bodily States:

28. Verbs expressing bodily temperature
29. Verbs of getting better/worse (of illness)
30. Verbs of getting younger/older
31. Verbs of sleeping/being unconscious
32. Verbs of swallowing/choking
33. Verbs of symptoms of diseases

Verbs of Cognition

34. Verbs of thinking/beginning to think
35. Verbs of (in)determinacy
36. Verbs of surprise/confusion
37. Verbs of knowing/change in knowledge
38. Verbs of agreeing/disagreeing

Verbs denoting Attitudes:

39. Verbs expressing sufficiency/usefulness
40. Verbs expressing appropriateness/suitability

Verbs of Speaking:

41. Verbs of speaking

Verbs of Success:

42. Verbs of success

- 22. Verbs of failing
- 23. Verbs of slipping/losing

Verbs of Ontological States:

- 24. Verbs of (dis)similarity
- 25. Verbs expressing superiority
- 26. Verbs of properties/abilities
- 27. Verbs of other ontological states

Verbs of Modality:

- 43. Verbs of obligation
- 44. Verbs of lacking
- 45. Verbs of permission

Verbs of Evidentiality:

- 46. Verbs of seeming/appearing

The predicates in the Dative Subject Construction may be grossly divided into two major categories, namely those which express experiencing events and those which express happenstance events. It turns out that the same gross division into event types is also found for the Accusative Subject Construction, although the nature of the narrowly-circumscribed semantic classes is slightly different (cf. Barðdal 2011). Consider first the classes that are found with the Dative Subject Construction:

Verbs denoting Emotions:

- 1. Verbs of liking/being pleased
- 2. Verbs of dislike
- 3. Verbs of longing
- 4. Verbs of caring
- 5. Verbs of fear/danger
- 6. Verbs of outrage/disgust
- 7. Verbs of pain:
- 8. Verbs of sorrow
- 9. Verbs of remorse

Verbs of Perception:

- 10. Verbs of dreaming

Verbs denoting Attitudes:

- 11. Verbs expressing appropriateness/suitability

Verbs of Gain:

- 12. Verbs of Assistance

Verbs of Bodily States:

- 13. Verbs expressing bodily temperature
- 14. Verbs of sleeping
- 15. Verbs of symptoms of diseases
- 16. Verbs of hunger/thirst
- 17. Verbs of bodily sensation
- 18. Verbs of bodily pain
- 19. Verbs of nausea

Verbs of Cognition:

- 20. Verbs of thinking
- 21. Verbs of surprise/confusion
- 22. Verbs of knowing
- 23. Verbs of disagreeing

Verbs of Happening:

- 24. Verbs of Happening

Verbs of Modality:

- 25. Verbs of lacking

These narrowly-circumscribed verb classes instantiating the Accusative Subject Construction are only 25 in number while the number is 46 for the Dative Subject Construction. This means that even though the two constructions occupy the same semantic space, the Accusative Subject Construction is still considerably less entrenched than the Dative Subject Construction. In other words, the Accusative Subject Constructions scatters more sparsely across the semantic space than the Dative Subject Construction (cf. Barðdal 2011).

However, there are further subclasses found occurring in the Accusative Subject Construction which are not found occurring in the Dative Subject Construction:

Verbs expressing Events and States in Nature and Landscape

26. Verbs of drifting
27. Verbs expression meteorological conditions
28. Verbs expressing events in nature
29. Verbs expressing states in nature:
30. Verbs expressing changes in locational position
31. Verbs expressing changes in states

Change in Time/Quantity/Space

32. Verbs of inception/termination
33. Verbs expressing change in quantity
34. Verbs expressing vertical motion in space

Most of these predicates are by nature anticausatives, i.e. they are intransitives derived from transitive verbs, and I chose to use the label *anticausative* because even though the derived relation is not coded on the verb, it is still not uncoded, as it is coded on the subject argument through case marking. In other words, the subject of the anticausative has the same case marking as the object of a corresponding transitive predicate. This alternation will be further discussed in Section 6 below.

3.3 Three-Place Predicates

The basic coding of three-place predicates in Icelandic is given in Table 6., which shows that predicates with two direct arguments divide across five different case patterns, namely Dat-Acc, Acc-Dat, Acc-Gen, Dat-Dat and Dat-Gen (Zaenen, Maling & Thráinsson 1985, Yip, Maling & Jackendoff 1987, Ottósson 1991, Holmberg & Platzack 1995, Kristoffersen 1998, Jónsson 2000, Maling 2002, Barðdal 2007). The distribution is lexically determined, although similarities and differences may be found between the patterns.

Table 6: Basic Coding of Three-Place Predicates in Icelandic

Two objects	Dat-Acc, Acc-Dat, Acc-Gen, Dat-Dat, Dat-Gen
One object + PP	Acc-PP.ACC, Acc-P.DAT Acc-PP.GEN Dat-PP.ACC, Dat-PP.DAT, Dat-PP.GEN
Two PPs	PP.ACC -PP.ACC ...

The Dat-Acc construction has the widest lexical semantic scope, as it may be instantiated by predicates expressing transfer, intention, creation, different modes of communication, enabling, retaining, mental processes and even possession (Barðdal 2007, Barðdal, Kristoffersen & Sveen 2011).

I have not undertaken a lexical semantic analysis of the predicates which may instantiate the remaining four case constructions in Modern Icelandic, although such an analysis exists for Old Norse-Icelandic (Barðdal, Kristoffersen & Sveen 2011). For instance, the Acc-Dat construction is found with predicates expressing hindrance and what we have labeled verbs of creation, in particular predicates where the object has been modified. These are verbal meanings like ‘decorate’, ‘mix’, ‘cover’, ‘span’, ‘surround’, ‘cover’ and ‘coat’.

The Acc-Gen construction is found with predicates expressing different modes of communication and with predicates of retaining/hindrance. The first category includes verbal meanings like ‘incite’, ‘ask’ and ‘demand’, while the latter includes meanings like ‘hide’.

The Dat-Gen construction is found with a wider range of predicates, and hence also a wider range of verbal meanings. It is found with predicates expressing transfer, like ‘deliver’, ‘lend’ and ‘obtain’, expressing intention, like ‘promise’, expressing retaining, like ‘deny’, as well as expressing mental processes like ‘wish’ and ‘not begrudge’.

Finally, the Dat-Dat construction is instantiated by predicates expressing transfer of money, like ‘pay (as a fine)’, expressing intention like ‘promise’, expressing communicated message like ‘answer’ or ‘threaten’, and finally expressing retaining, like ‘deny’.

There are only minimal differences between Modern Icelandic and Old Norse-Icelandic when it comes to predicates with two direct objects. Some of the predicates which instantiate these case frames in Old Norse-Icelandic have become associated with other case frames in Modern Icelandic. The change from Old Norse-Icelandic to Modern is thus manifested in a shrinkage in the scope of the semantic space these constructions occupy. Moreover, several of the predicates selecting for two direct arguments in Modern Icelandic may alternate between that pattern and the other patterns with prepositional phrases, as discussed in Section 4.2 below.

I now leave the issue of basic valency in Icelandic to move on to alternations, the uncoded alternations in Section 4 and the coded ones in Section 5.

4. Uncoded Alternations

In this section, I discuss first case variation, i.e. alternations which are only found within a given argument of a predicate, without any changes in the structure (Section 4.1). Then I give an overview of the alternations which come together with a change in the argument structure of the predicate (Section 4.2). Finally, I give an outline of other alternations which involve a change in the structure of the clause (Section 4.3), but are still not coded on the verb.

4.1 Case Variation

One of the best-known case phenomenon in Icelandic involves Dative Substitution, a.k.a. “Dative Sickness”, where predicates which occur with accusative subjects start taking dative subjects instead of the prescribed and the historically original accusative (Rögvaldsson 1983, Eythórsson 2000, 2002, Jónsson & Eythórsson 2005, Barðdal 2011):

- (3a) **Mig** langar alltaf á Subway
me.ACC longs always on Subway
‘I always want to go to Subway’
- (3b) **Mér** langar alltaf á Subway
me.DAT longs always on Subway
‘I always want to go to Subway’

This case variation is quite productive although it does not target all accusative subject predicates but first and foremost the predicates which express experience, cognition, perception, etc., and not the accusative subject predicates which express other kinds of happenstance events, like changes in landscape and nature (cf. Barðdal 2011).

Another type of case variation is found with objects, in particular accusative and dative objects. This variation manifests itself as a conventionalized choice between dative and accusative, with dative being confined to animate objects:

- (4a) *Ég þvoði **henni** á bak við eyrun.*
I washed her.DAT on behind with ears-the
'I washed her behind the ears.'
- (4b) *Ég þvoði **pelana** í upphvottavélinni.*
I washed bottles-the.ACC in washing-machine-the
'I washed the milk bottles in the washing machine.'
- (5a) *Ég þurrkaði **henni** um bakið, brjóstin og magann.*
I dried her.DAT of back-the, breasts-the and stomache-the
'I dried her back, breasts and stomach.'
- (5b) *Ég þurrkaði **tölvuna** hið snarasta með eldhúspappír ...*
I dried computer-the.ACC the quickest with kitchen-paper
'I immediately dried the computer with kitchen roll ...'

This variation between accusative and dative objects, with dative being used with animate objects and accusative with non-animate, is presumably very old, and is found in many Indo-European languages. It seems to be limited to a handful of verbs, like 'wash' and 'dry' (cf. Barðdal 1993).

Another type of case variation, which may rightfully be termed DOM, i.e. Differential Object Marking, is also found in Icelandic, with verbs like *klóra* 'scratch'. The dative is used when the object is construed as a beneficiary, while the accusative is used when the object is construed as an ordinary theme/patient.

- (6a) ... *klóraði **honum** um bakið, nuddaði á honum íljarnar ...*
scratched him.DAT of back-the, massaged on him sole-the
'... scratched his back, massaged his soles ...'
- (6b) ... *björninn klóraði **hann** og beit.*
bear-the scratched him.ACC and bit
'... the bear scratched him and bit him.'

This type of Differential Object Marking, however, is neither very productive nor widespread in Icelandic. There is, in contrast, another type of case variation in Icelandic where accusative objects have started occurring in the dative case, without any visible difference in meaning (Barðdal 1993):

- (7a) *Agnes keyrði **mig** út á völl.*
Agnes drove me.ACC out on airport
'Agnes drove me to the airport.'
- (7b) *Mamma keyrði **mér** heim.*
Mom drove me.DAT home
'Mom drove me home.'

It is of course possible that the animacy of the object referent in this particular case is the motivating factor behind the increased use of the dative case here. There is however, another pattern in Icelandic, also involving a variation between accusative and dative objects, which is clearly not motivated by animacy. As this pattern also involves a change in the structure of the complement of the verb, it is discussed in next section.

4.2 Case and Structure-Changing Alternations

Several intransitive and transitive verbs may occur in the so-called Caused-Motion Construction, and when they do, the object selects for the dative case (Barðdal 2001a: 151–156, Barðdal 2008: 120–125):

- | | | |
|-------|---|----------------------|
| (8a) | <i>Ég kem.</i>
I come
'I'll come.' | <i>Intransitive</i> |
| (8b) | <i>Ég kem þessu til þín.</i>
I'll come this.DAT to you
'I'll get this over to you.' | <i>Caused-Motion</i> |
| (9a) | <i>Ég hósta.</i>
I cough
'I'm coughing.' | <i>Intransitive</i> |
| (9b) | <i>Hann hóstaði upp þremur milljónum.</i>
he coughed up three.DAT millions.DAT
'He managed to raise three millions' | <i>Caused-Motion</i> |
| (10a) | <i>Hann smurði brauðið.</i>
he buttered bread-the.ACC
'He buttered the bread.' | <i>Transitive</i> |
| (10b) | <i>Hann smurði smjörinu á brauðið.</i>
he smeared butter-the.DAT on bread-the
'He spread the butter on the bread.' | <i>Caused-Motion</i> |

When I state, above, that the In/Transitive alternation with the Caused-Motion Construction entails a change in structure, I mean that a locative/directional phrase, either a PP selected by the object or an adverbial is obligatorily present. In other words, without a locative or a directional phrase, the Caused-Motion construction with a dative is infelicitous (cf. Barðdal 2001a: 152–153, 2008: 122ff.).

The Caused-Motion Construction with a dative object is very productive in Icelandic (cf. Barðdal 2008: Ch. 3). It is generally found with borrowed verbs of caused-motion, but also with inherited verbs which allow for a caused-motion construal, either concrete or metaphorical. The construction has, it seems, been attracting more and more inherited verbs from a corresponding Transfer Construction with an accusative object during the last decades, as already documented by Barðdal as early as in (1993) in and later publications.

Another case and structure-changing alternation in Icelandic is the Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat Alternation (Barðdal 2001b), which works in such a way that a set of predicates select for both the Dat-Nom and the Nom-Dat argument structures:

- (11a) *Mér* hefur alltaf fallið *þetta* vel. *Dat-Nom*
 me.DAT has always fallen this.NOM well
 ‘I have always liked this.’
- (11b) *Þetta* hefur alltaf fallið *mér* vel. *Nom-Dat*
 this.NOM has always fallen me.DAT well
 ‘This has always pleased me.’

Syntactic tests reveal that these are two different argument structure constructions, and that (11a), for instance, is not a topicalization of (11b), as one might be tempted to think at first (Barðdal 2001b, Eythórsson & Barðdal 2005: 840–842, *inter alia*). The syntactic tests used involve default word order, binding of anaphors, raising-to-subject, raising-to-object, conjunction reduction and omission in control infinitives. All the tests show without a doubt that these are two distinct argument structure constructions, although they are clearly related, and what determines the choice of one over the other is the topicality of the arguments. That is, when the experiencer argument is more topical, the Dat-Nom construction is used, while when the content/stimulus is more topical, the Nom-Dat construction is used.

So far in Icelandic, more than hundred predicates have been documented as participating in this alternation (Barðdal 2001b: 53–58), although not all Dat-Nom predicates in Icelandic do. Some predicates like *líka* ‘like’ and *leiðast* ‘be bored’ are not found in a corresponding Nom-Dat construction. Notice that the synonymous predicate *falla* (*i gæð*) ‘be to one’s liking’ is, however, found to be an alternating predicate of this type, as suggested by the examples in (11) above.

All the predicates participating in this alternation have the kind of semantic structure that Croft (1993, 1998) defines as lacking a unidirectional causal component, where one participant acts upon another participant. Instead, the event may be construed as either the animate participant directing his/her attention towards the content, or as the stimulus affecting the animate participant. In the former case, we get the Dat-Nom argument structure construction, while in the second case we get the Nom-Dat argument structure construction. The predicates that have been identified as participating in this alternation are of various lexical semantic classes, such as verbs denoting experience, cognition, perception, attitudes and gain.

Ditransitives with three core arguments are also found to alternate between an NP-NP structure and an NP-PP structure in Icelandic:

- (12a) *Ég sendi henni bókina.*
 I send her.DAT book-the.ACC
 ‘I sent her the book.’
- (12b) *Ég sendi bókina til hennar.*
 I sent book-the.ACC to her.GEN
 ‘I sent the book to her.’

There is a clear difference in meaning between the two alternants, as the NP-PP structure has an allative meaning in Icelandic, while the NP-NP structure does not.

This means that only predicates which encompass allative semantics may occur in this alternation, evident from the following example of the verb *gefa* ‘give as a present’ in Icelandic, which cannot instantiate the NP-PP structure. In other words, the verb *gefa* in Icelandic can only mean ‘give as a present’ and cannot mean ‘hand’.

- (13) *Ég gaf henni bókina.*
 I gave her.DAT book-the.ACC
 ‘I gave her the book.’
- (13b) **Ég gaf bókina til hennar.*
 I gave book-the.ACC to her.GEN
 ‘I handed the book to her.’

In the terminology of Barðdal (2007), it is first and foremost verbs of delivering like *rétta* ‘hand over’, verbs of sending like *senda* ‘send’, verbs of bringing like *bera* ‘bring’ and verbs of instrument of communicated message like *faxa* ‘fax’ and *sms-a* ‘text’, which may instantiate the NP-PP pattern (cf. Barðdal 2008: Ch. 5. The NP-NP pattern, however, is instantiated by several different lexical semantic verb classes, like verbs of lending, verbs of paying, verbs of static possession, verbs of future transfer, verbs denoting transfer along a path, verbs of enabling, verbs of communicated message, verbs of creation, verbs of obtaining, verbs of utilizing, verbs of hindrance, verbs of constraining and verbs of mental activities.

Another alternation, the Conative Alternation, is found in Icelandic with verbs which involve partitivity, i.e. verbs whose objects can be construed as having the ability to be partially affected. This involves verbs like ‘eat’ and ‘read’:

- (14a) *Hann borðaði ísinn.*
 he ate icecream.ACC
 ‘He ate the ice cream.’
- (14b) *Hann borðaði af ísnum.*
 he ate of icecream.DAT
 ‘He ate of the ice cream.’
- (15a) *Hann las blaðið.*
 he read newspaper.ACC
 ‘He read the newspaper.’
- (15b) *Hann las í blaðinu.*
 he read in newspaper.DAT
 ‘He read in the newspaper.’

The Conative Alternation always involves the abandonment of a direct argument for a prepositional object. The case marking of this prepositional object is not semantically motivated but is lexically determined, i.e. it is based on the preposition which is used.

Icelandic also has an uncoded “middle”, i.e. a construction which describes the inherent properties of an object, without the verb being morphologically coded:

- (16) *Málningin þekur vel*
 paint-the.NOM covers well
 ‘The paint has good coverage.’

This is not a productive pattern in Icelandic, so the typical example from the English literature of a sofa which may “sit four people” would be ungrammatical in Icelandic.

4.3 Other Non-coded Alternations

Meteorological verbs do not select for a grammatical subject in Icelandic, as shown in (17) below. The element corresponding to ‘it’ in (17a) is an expletive, and it is not found in clauses containing subject-verb inversion, as shown in (17b), and hence does not invert with the verb, as would be expected from an ordinary subject:

- (17a) *Það rigndi í gær.*
 it rained in yesterday
 ‘It rained yesterday.’
- (17b) *Í gær rigndi (*það).*
 in yesterday rained it
 ‘Yesterday it rained.’

Meteorological verbs, moreover, are also found in the so-called ‘It’–‘He’ alternation. That is, they may occur with a personal pronoun ‘he’, instead of with the expletive ‘it’:

- (18) *Hann rigndi í gær.*
 he rained in yesterday
 ‘It rained yesterday.’

This personal pronoun behaves syntactically like a subject, in contrast to the dummy, as it inverts with the verb when a temporal adverb is in first position (cf. Falk 1993: xx)

- (19) *Þá rigndi hann loksins.*
 then rained he last
 ‘Then it rained at last.’

The last uncoded alternation to be discussed here involves object omission. Icelandic is neither a pro-drop language nor an argument-drop language. As in other Germanic languages, including English, object omission is typically found in Icelandic when the object is contextually retrievable, as in (20) below, or when it is general enough to be left unexpressed (cf. Goldberg 2005). This is typically found with verbs meaning ‘eat’, ‘drink’ and others like that:

- (20) *Hrói höttur stelur frá þeim ríku og gefur þeim fátæku.*
 Robin Hood steals from the rich and gives the poor
 ‘Robin Hood steals from the rich and gives to the poor.’

Unlike in English, however, an object may also be omitted if it shared across coordinated verb phrases, like in (21) below:

- (21) *Ég fór beint í fjöruna, sótti þing af þara, þurrkaði og ...*
 I went straight in beach, picked-up heap of seaweed, dried and
 ‘I went straight to the beach, found a heap of seaweed, dried (it) and ...’

It is not a general property of Icelandic that topical information may be left unexpressed; this kind of object omission seems to be confined to same-objects, and is as such a structural restriction, not bound to any specific lexical-semantic verb classes.

5. Verb-Coded Alternations

Alternations that are coded on the verb in Icelandic are of various types. The Active–Passive Alternation is of course very productive, while other less productive alternations are also found in Icelandic, like the Intransitive–Inchoative Alternation which is highly lexicalized and only found with a few predicates in Icelandic.

Beginning with the Active–Passive Alternation, Icelandic has three different regular passives, the Nominative, Dative and Genitive Passive, instantiated by verbs which take accusative, dative and genitive objects respectively:

- (22a) **Sagan** var sögð aftur og aftur. *Nom. Passive (with accusative object verbs)*
 story-the.NOM was told again and again
 ‘The story was told again and again.’
- (22b) **Ömmu** voru send blóm. *Dative Passive (with dative object verbs)*
 grandma.DAT were sent flowers.NOM
 ‘Grandma got sent flowers.’
- (22c) **Hans** var leitað lengi. *Genitive Passive (with genitive object verbs)*
 he.GEN was looked-for long
 ‘He was searched for for a long time.’

Only agentive predicates may participate in this alternation; oblique subject predicates, for instance, cannot passivize in Icelandic, and neither can regular nominative subject predicates if they are semantically stative. Verbs like ‘own’, for instance, do not passivize in Icelandic, as opposed to in English and Swedish (cf. Barðdal & Molnár 2003).

Passives can also be formed with intransitive predicates, the so-called Impersonal Passive. It allegedly occurs only with unergatives, although I find examples with unaccusatives fully grammatical (cf. also Barðdal & Molnár 2003):

- (23) *Á föstudaginn var haldið á Snorrastaði ásamt fríðu föruneyti: Fríðu, Helmu, Björney og Rósu. Við tókum þá skyndiákvörðun að skella okkur bara í skreytó-ferðina og verður ekki séð eftir því ...*
 becomes not seen after it
 ‘Last Friday we took off to Snorrastaðir, by comely escorts: Fríða, Helma, Björney and Rósa. We made a spontaneous decision to just wade onto the school trip and this **will not be regretted.**’

An extension of the Impersonal Passive with transitive predicates, the so-called *Actional Passive* will be further discussed in Section 6 below.

Icelandic also has a Reflexive (Mediopassive) Construction, which is a highly-polysemous category in Icelandic encompassing reflexive meanings, reciprocal meanings, middles, as well as deponens (cf. Anderson 1990, Ottósson 1993, Barðdal & Molnár 2003). The Reflexive Construction is manifested in an *-st*, originally the reflexive *sik* ‘self’, contracted to *-sk*, and then later changed to *-st*, suffixed on the verbal stem.

- (24a) *Hann settist.* *Reflexive*
 he sat-*st*
 ‘He sat down.’
- (24b) *Þau kysstust.* *Reciprocal*
 they kissed-*st*
 ‘They kissed (each other).’
- (24c) *Dyrrar opnuðust.* *Middle*
 door-the opened-*st*
 ‘The door opened (by themselves).’
- (24d) *Hann andaðist.* *Deponons*
 he breathed-*st*
 ‘He died.’

The category of deponens is highly lexicalized and so are the Reflexive and the Reciprocal Constructions, although a substantial number of predicates are found participating in these constructions. That is, they are not confined to a small set of predicates. The middle, in contrast, may be formed productively with all predicates that allow for a construal where things happen by themselves and it stands in a paradigmatic opposition to the category of active and the category of passive (cf. Ottósson 1993).

Icelandic also has an Impersonal Mediopassive (modal passive) formed with the same verbal morphology:

- (25) *Það sást til hans í skóginum.*
 it saw-*st* to him.GEN in woods-the.DAT
 ‘He was seen in the woods’

The Impersonal Mediopassive is only found with a handful of predicates of perception, like *sjá* ‘see’, *heyra* ‘hear’ and others like that.

The last verb-coded alternation to be discussed here is the so-called Intransitive–Inchoative Alternation (cf. Ottósson 2009, Cennamo, Eythórsson & Barðdal 2011), where the intransitive variant is unmarked, while the inchoative variant is marked on the verb with the suffix *-na*, with or without umlaut on the stem vowel:

- (26a) *Gott er að sofa í morgunmund.*
 good is to sleep in morning-early
 ‘It is good to sleep in the early hours.’

(26b) *Megum aldrei **sofna** á verðinum.*
 may never fall-asleep on guard-the
 ‘We may never fall asleep on the guard.’

(27) *vekja* ‘waken’ – *vaka* ‘be awake’ – *vakna* ‘wake up’

The *-na* suffix may also be regarded as a general detransitivizing device, as evident from the fact that it may be found alternating with both intransitive and transitive verbs, as shown in (27) above (cf. Cennamo, Eythórsson & Barðdal 2011).

6. Additional Icelandic Peculiarities

In this section I will present two alternations in Icelandic that have been regarded as specific for Icelandic, the Oblique Anticausative Alternation and the New Passive Construction which I will call the Actional Passive. The first one is not particularly well known, while the second has received a considerable attention in the literature during the last decade or so.

Beginning with the anticausative, Icelandic has an ordinary anticausative construction with ambitransitive or labile predicates which can either be transitive or intransitive. An example of this is given in (28):

(28)	<i>Ég sýð vatnið</i>	vs.	<i>Vatnið sýður</i>
	I.NOM boil water-the.ACC		water-the.NOM boils
	‘I boil the water’		‘The water boils’

Notice that the intransitive variant has a subject in the nominative case, which is what is common crosslinguistically for ambitransitive/labile verbs of this sort.

In addition to this type of ambitransitives, Icelandic also has what I chose to call the Oblique Anticausative Construction, where the verb is not coded, as is usual for anticausatives, but the subject argument is coded (cf. also Maling & Zaenen 1990). Examples are given in (29–31) below, with accusatives, dative and genitives, respectively:

(29)	Accusative		
	<i>Ég sá veginn óglögg.</i>	vs.	<i>Veginn sá óglögg.</i>
	I.NOM saw road-the.ACC unclearly		road-the.ACC saw unclearly
	‘I didn’t see the road clearly.’		‘The road could hardly be seen.’

(30)	Dative		
	<i>Ég hleð niður börnum</i>	vs.	<i>Snjónum hleður niður.</i>
	I.NOM load down children-the.DAT		snow-the.DAT loads down
	‘I pile up children’		‘The snow piles up.’
	or ‘I have a lot of children’		

(31)	Genitive		
	<i>Ég gat þess í bréfinu.</i>	vs.	<i>Þess gat í bréfinu.</i>
	I.NOM mentioned it.GEN in letter		it.GEN mentioned in letter
	‘I mentioned it in the letter.’		‘It was mentioned in the letter.’

Observe, moreover, that the subject case of the anticausative corresponds to the object case of the transitive variant. That is, when the transitive verb selects for an accusative object, the subject of the corresponding anticausative variant is also in the accusative, etc. This means that the subject case marking of the anticausative is dependent on the object case marking of the corresponding transitive verb.

Not all transitive verbs in Icelandic participate in this alternation. Sandal (2011), in her work on the Accusative Anticausative in Old Norse-Icelandic documents that change-of-state verbs and motion verbs are most frequently found in this alternation (cf. Haspelmath 1987), but also some psych verbs and a small set of verbs denoting affectedness. The event expressed by the anticausative must be non-specific and have the ability to be conceptualized as occurring spontaneously, without the influence of an external force. Sandal's description of Old Norse-Icelandic, it appears, seems to capture the facts of Modern Icelandic as well.

It is noteworthy, however, that not all change-of-state verbs and motion verbs in Icelandic participate in this alternation. That is, the alternation is not productive or rule-based, but is lexically restricted. In some cases, one of the alternants shows semantic idiosyncrasies, which suggests that the two alternants do not necessarily stand in a derivational relation to each other synchronically in Old Norse-Icelandic.

There are reasons to believe that this type of alternation was once more productive than it is now and that this may have been a more general detransitivizing device as it is also found with ditransitive predicates in Icelandic. For instance, *gefa* 'give' selects for Nom-Dat-Acc when it is used ditransitively, but only for Dat-Acc when its valency is reduced (ex. 32). Another verb, *þýsa* 'urge', selects for Nom-Acc-Gen when used ditransitively, but only for Acc-Gen in the anticausative function (ex. 33).

- (32) Dat-Acc
Ég gaf þeim byr. vs. *Þeim gaf byr.*
 I.NOM gave them.DAT wind.ACC them.DAT gave wind.ACC
 'I gave them wind.' 'They were given wind.' or
 'They received wind'
- (33) Acc-Gen
að þýsa einhvern einhvers vs. *Einhvern þýsir einhvers.*
 to urge someone.ACC something.GEN someone.ACC desires something.GEN
 'urge someone to do something' 'someone desires something'
 (Ottosson 2009: 44)

Notice in example (33) the aforementioned lack of semantic transparency between the verbs in the two alternants, *þýsa* means 'urge' in the ditransitive variant but 'desire' in the derived transitive variant.

Similar constructions, where the subject-like argument is not in the nominative case with semantic middles in the active voice, but is still in the same case as when the verb is used transitively, also exist in Modern Russian, Lithuanian, Old Saxon and Bavarian German:

- (34a) *Sodą prinėšė sniego.* Lithuanian
 garden.ACC brought snow.GEN
 'The garden was filled with snow.'

- (34b) **Lodku** uneslo vniz po tečeniju. Modern Russian
 boat.ACC drifted-away down on stream
 ‘The boat drifted down the stream.’
- (34c) **fâhit im** an sâlig thing Old Saxon
 brings.3P.SG him.DAT to holy thing
 ‘he is brought to holy things’ (Heliand 3477)
- (34d) *Es trieb den Kahn an den Strand.* (Kainhofer 2002) Bavarian German
 it drove the.ACC boat to the beach
 ‘The boat drifted to the beach.’

Notice that the example from Bavarian German in (34d) has developed from an earlier construction without the expletive *es* ‘it’, a development that took place in the history of German with all predicates without a nominative argument, although this development happened in stages involving different classes of predicates at different times (cf. Lenerz 1977). Hence, the Bavarian German construction in (34d) is cognate with a corresponding construction in Icelandic, shown in (35):

- (35) **Bátinn** rak að landi.
 boat-the.ACC drove to land
 ‘The boat drifted to the shore.’

Compare also the following Latin examples, where (36a) is transitive with a nominative subject and an accusative object, while in (36b) the subject of the intransitive is in the accusative. This appears to be the same kind of alternation reported on above for Icelandic, Bavarian German, Old Saxon, Lithuanian and Old Russian.

- (36a) *nisi memoria me fallit* Transitive
 if-not memory.NOM me.ACC deceives
 ‘if memory does not deceive me’
- (36b) *quod me non sefellit* Oblique Intransitive
 as-far-as-this I.ACC not is-in-error
 ‘I was not (I did not happen to be) wrong as far as this is concerned’

This comparative evidence involving Oblique Anticausatives from other Germanic languages, as well as Balto-Slavic, may suggest that the construction is inherited from an earlier stage, and is not specific for Icelandic, as argued for instance by Ottosson (2009).

As the last point of discussion, I would like to mention that Icelandic has an Impersonal Passive Construction that may be instantiated by transitive verbs like *lemja* ‘hit’ which selects for an accusative object in the active voice (36a), *hrinda* ‘push’ which selects for a dative object in the active voice (36b), as well as by verbs like *segja* ‘say’ which may select for two objects in the active voice, an indirect and a direct object (37c). This construction has been called the “New Passive” or the “New Construction” in the literature (see references below), but I refer to it here as the Actional Passive.

- (37a) *Fyrst [presturinn] var mættur var platað hann til að blessa völlinn líka.*
 since priest-the was shown-up was tricked him.ACC for to bless court-the too
 ‘Since the priest was already there, he was tricked into blessing the court too.’
- (37b) *... þar segi ég frá því hvernig var hjálpað mér í gegnum þetta.*
 there tell I from it how was helped me.DAT in through this
 ‘... there I tell how I was helped through this.’
- (37c) *Sáum Pokafoss og það var sagt okkur söguna um af hverju hann heitir Pokafoss.*
 Pokafoss
 ‘We saw the waterfall Pokafoss and we were told the story about why it is called Pokafoss.’ (<http://andreaogeva.blogcentral.is/blog/2007/7/5/haeae>)

The instantiation of transitives and ditransitives in an Impersonal Passive Construction is rather surprising given that Impersonal Passives are a special development of canonical passives, a development specifically implementing intransitives, which are otherwise excluded from occurring in the canonical passive construction. In contrast, transitives and ditransitives occur freely in the canonical passive. This suggests that the relation between the Impersonal Passive and the canonical passive is not as straightforward as usually assumed.

That the Impersonal Passive construction starts occurring with transitive verbs suggests a certain degree of entrenchment and a *unit status* of the Impersonal Passive. That the Impersonal Passive has a unit status is supported by the fact that it is traditionally called *verknaðarmynd* ‘Actional Passive’ in the Icelandic grammar tradition (Friðjónsson 1989), as opposed to the canonical passive which is called *þolmynd* and the active which is called *germynd*. The term *verknaðarmynd* ‘Actional Passive’ refers to the higher degree of actionality than in the canonical passive which is processual. That is, the emphasis is on the *event* as opposed to being on, depending on one’s view of the relation between actives and passives, the change in perspective between actives passives, or to being on the change in activity aspect, i.e. from active or stative to processual (cf. Landén & Molnár 2003, Barðdal & Molnár 2003). In that sense, one could say that the Actional Passive is even more eventive than the canonical passive which is processual, as it highlights the event. Observe that the Impersonal Passive construction in Icelandic is highly actional even when instantiated by intransitive predicates:

- (38a) *Sem betur fer var Patricia álíka klár og ég á bretti þannig að við vorum saman tvær í léttustu barnabrekkunni :-)* og meira að segja þar **var mikið dottið.**
 was much fallen
 ‘Fortunately, Patricia’s skating abilities were similar to mine, so the two of us were together in the easiest children’s slope :-) and even there **a lot of falling took place.**’
- (38b) *Fórum á ramp-pall þar sem var mikið dottið og mikið gaman :D*
 went on ramp where which was much fallen and much fun
 ‘(We) went to a ramp where **a lot of falling took place** and we had great fun :D’

In (38a) the falling is unintentional as the speaker's skating skills are quite limited, as s/he admits in the discourse. So in spite of the fact that the speaker was in the easiest slope, meant for children, s/he still could not help falling. In contrast, in example (38b), the event is construed as if falling and having fun is one of the intensions with going skating at this particular ramp.

I will not use more space on arguing for the unit status of the Impersonal passive in Icelandic, as it requires an article-length treatment of its own. I will let it suffice to mention that there is a lively debate in the literature on the status of this construction as a passive construction or an active construction. For instance, it is argued by Kjartansson (1991), Barðdal & Molnár (2003), Eythórsson (2008), Jónsson (2009) and Sigurðsson (2011) that the construction is a passive construction, while Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir (1997, 2002) and Maling (2006) argue that the construction is an active construction. They argue that one of the distinctions between actives and passives is that participial adjuncts may be bound by subjects of active clauses and not by the agents of passive clauses. Therefore, examples like the one in (38), where the underlying agent is bound by a participial adjunct shows that this example should be analyzed as an active clause and not a passive clause:

- (39) *Það var lesið minningargreinina grátandi.*
 it was read obituary-the.ACC crying
 'The obituary was read, crying.' or 'They read the obituary crying.'

However, similar examples with canonical passives may also be found, both in Icelandic (40), and in English (41); the latter, by the way, does not have an Impersonal Passive Construction, neither with intransitive predicates nor with transitive ones:

- (40a) ... *að aukamáltíðirnar séu aldrei borðaðar standandi.*
 that extra-meals-the.NOM are.SUBJ never eaten standing
 '... that the extra meals are never eaten standing down.'
- (40b) *Skálin var drukkin, standandi. Ari Arason Orri stóð fyrstur upp, brosandí.*
 bowl-the.NOM was drunk standing Ari Arason Orri stood first up
 smiling
 'The cheering took place while standing. Ari Arason Orri was the first to stand up, smiling.'
- (41a) *The weather was lovely and lunch was eaten sitting on the grass near the park.*
- (41b) *During the days of Homer, food was eaten sitting down at the table and the couch was used only for a nap.*

Given the grammaticality of the Icelandic canonical passive in (40) where a participial adjunct is bound and the grammaticality of the comparable English examples in (41), either the examples of the Actional Passive in (39) and similar ones must be analyzed as passives, on Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir's own account, or examples of canonical passives in Icelandic in (40) and in English in (41) must be analyzed as actives.

This discussion of the extension of the Impersonal Passive to more transitive predicates resulting in the Actional Passive concludes the present overview of

alternations in Icelandic, both uncoded and coded ones, and the valency classes accompanying them.

7. Summary and Conclusions

Icelandic exhibits a complex and a dynamic interplay between case marking, agreement and verb-coded alternations. The coding of arguments is manifested in part through case marking and in part through structural options like prepositional phrases. Subjects must, of course, be direct arguments but there are also so-called prepositional objects in Icelandic which are selected by specific predicates. Case marking in Icelandic is partly semantically transparent and partly not. Dative case marking, for instance, on subjects of verbs low in transitivity, coincides with dative marking on indirect objects of ditransitives. However, indirect objects may also be marked in the accusative case and so may syntactic subjects (cf. Barðdal 2001: Ch 3). Highly transitive predicates in Icelandic are in the expected Nom-Acc case frame, predicates low in transitivity are in the Nom-Gen case frame, while the predicates which select for the Nom-Dat case frame are a) partly high in transitivity, like *eyðileggja* ‘destroy’ and *rústa* ‘ruin’, b) they are partly motion verbs like *kasta* ‘throw’ and *slaka* ‘slacken’, and c) they are partly predicates of human interaction. These are the overall tendencies that have emerged from the present investigation.

However, with that said, the Nom-Acc case frames may be instantiated by predicates which are both high and low in transitivity, as Nom-Acc is also the default case frame for transitive predicates in Icelandic. The Accusative and the Dative Subject Constructions divide across two types of events, namely experience-based and happenstance events. It is therefore a gross oversimplification to state that oblique subjects in Icelandic are confined to experiencers or to experiences and beneficiaries, as is frequently done in the literature (cf. Barðdal 2004 and the references cited there). There is also a semantic overlap between the Accusative and the Dative Subject Construction which motivates the well-known tendency called Dative Substitution. The fact that Oblique Subjects in Icelandic divide across so many different types of lexical-semantic verb classes motivates a larger cross-linguistic study of oblique subject predicates as these are typically discussed in the literature as being confined to experiences. Either Icelandic, and perhaps Indo-European in general (cf. Barðdal et al. 2011), has developed a broad category of oblique subjects, a development which may be confined to this specific language family, or the experiencer role is generally very broadly defined in the literature.

Another issue worthy of a problematization is the classification between accusative, ergative and active languages, as this classification is based on transitive and intransitive predicates but sets aside several less salient patterns of argument coding (cf. Donohue 2008), such as the three leftmost rows in Table 3 in Section 3 above, reproduced below for the sake of convenience. The Dixonian trichotomy also sets aside the internal variation found between subtypes of the Nominative Subject Construction.

Depending on one’s preferences, it should be possible to claim that Icelandic is a) an accusative language, b) an ergative language, and c) an active language. If one takes the Nom-Acc and the Nom-only in the first column as one’s point of departure, one of course concludes that Icelandic is an accusative language. However, if one takes the Nom-Acc in the first column and the Acc-only at the top of the second column as a point of departure, then clearly one would argue that Icelandic is an

ergative language. Finally, if one takes Nom-Acc in the first column and both Nom-only and Acc-only to the left in the topmost row, then clearly one would argue that Icelandic must be an active type of language (cf. Barðdal & Eythórsson 2011). Such claims are also found in literature; Compare for instance Andrews (2001) where it is claimed that Modern Icelandic is a Split-S language. One could, of course, always argue that Icelandic is an accusative language on the basis of default or most frequent case assignment, although I doubt that Dixon intended his alignment typology to boil down to frequencies in the end. Whichever stand one has on this issue for Icelandic, it is undeniable that Icelandic exhibits structures which clearly count as semantic alignment in terms of Donohue (2008), as is evident, again, from the three rightmost columns in Table 3. These are non-canonically case-marked argument structure constructions, motivated in part by semantic consideration.

Table 3: Basic Coding of In/Transitives in Icelandic

Nom	Acc	Dat	Gen
Nom-only	Acc-only	Dat-only	Gen-only
Nom-Acc	Acc-Nom	Dat-Nom	Gen-Nom
Nom-Dat	Acc-Acc		
Nom-Gen	Acc-Gen		
Nom-PP	Acc-PP	Dat-PP	Gen-PP
Nom-S	Acc-S	Dat-S	Gen-S

Turning to the issue of coded alternations, Icelandic has a healthy mix of case variation and coded alternations, including voice alternations. It is more or less only the voice alternations that are coded in Icelandic, with other alternations being uncoded. For instance, Icelandic has no specific causative marker, inchoative marker or a resultative marker. These functions are obtained through lexical polysemy and different structural options. Reflexive and reciprocals, in contrast, are morphologically marked, sharing the morphological marker *-st* with middles and deponent verbs. These functions may also be found with unmarked verb occurring with a reflexive object instead.

The Passive is coded differently from the Mediopassive, namely with a periphrastic structure. Icelandic exhibits a large inventory of different passive constructions, ranging from Nominative, Accusative and Dative Passives, to Impersonal Passives which have been extended not only to reflexive objects and prepositional objects, but also to ordinary transitive and ditransitive predicates, resulting in what I have called here the Actional Passive (cf. Barðdal & Molnár 2003).

Icelandic also has two ways of rendering anticausativization; first with the use of reflexive morphology, and second with two types of labile verbs. The first category of labile verbs comes with a nominative subject in the anticausative intransitive, while the subject case marking of the latter is dependent on the object case marking of its transitive correspondent. Hence, the first one is an example of lability proper, while the second counts as a coded anticausative, although the coding is not found on the verb but on the subject argument. This second type of anticausativization, I believe, is quite rare cross-linguistically.

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