

Icelandic Valency Classes: Oblique Subjects, Oblique Ambitransitives 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 Transitive–Inchoative, the Reflexive and the Mediopassive. In Section 6, additional alternations are discussed, namely the Oblique Ambitransitive, 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 the present 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 maintenance 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

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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 writers of fictional texts are also regularly translated into other languages.

Turning to the grammar and the structure of Icelandic, it is a SVO and a V2 language. That is, the subject is in first position in neutral word order, followed by the predicate. When another constituent occurs in first position, conveying either 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 older Indo-European languages like case marking and agreement, not only subject-verb agreement but also agreement internal to the noun phrase.

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 and modifying elements. This includes the suffixed definite article which originates in a demonstrative pronoun, yielding double, and hence internal, case marking on most definite nouns (cf. Barðdal 2001a: 12).

Table 1: Noun Phrase Internal Agreement

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

As shown in Table 2, the masc. singular accusative of the suffixed definite article and the neut. singular nominative/accusative are attached to the bare stem, but all the other forms have a specific case ending on the stem, in addition to the case ending on the definite article, resulting in the afore-mentioned double, or internal, case marking of definite nouns in Icelandic. The masc. and neut. dative forms are *-i*, while the masc. and neut. genitive forms are *-s*. Adjectives also agree with the nouns in case and gender; the weak adjectival declension is found with definite nouns and the strong declension with indefinite nouns.

Table 2: Double Case Marking within the Noun Phrase

	NOM SG		ACC SG	
Masc.	<i>gamli</i> old	<i>maður-inn</i> man.nom-the.nom	<i>gamla</i> old	<i>mann-inn</i> man.acc-the.acc
Fem.	<i>gamla</i> old	<i>kona-n</i> woman.nom-the.nom	<i>gömlu</i> old	<i>konu-na</i> woman.acc-the.acc
Neut.	<i>gamla</i> old	<i>blað-ið</i> paper.nom-the.nom	<i>gamla</i> old	<i>blað-ið</i> paper.acc-the.acc
	DAT SG		GEN SG	
Masc.	<i>gamla</i> old	<i>manni-num</i> man.dat-the.dat	<i>gamla</i> old	<i>manns-ins</i> man.gen-the.gen
Fem.	<i>gömlu</i> old	<i>konu-ni</i> woman.dat-the.dat	<i>gömlu</i> old	<i>konu-nnar</i> woman.gen-the.gen
Neut.	<i>gamla</i> old	<i>blaði-nu</i> paper.dat-the.dat	<i>gamla</i> old	<i>blaðs-ins</i> paper.gen-the.gen

Turning to agreement, the Icelandic predicate agrees with the nominative argument, be it a nominative subject or a nominative object, as shown in (1a–b) below:

- (1a) *Menn-irmir keyptu hesta-na.*
men-the.NOM bought.3P.PL horses-the.ACC
‘The men bought the book.’
- (1b) *Henni líkuðu menn-irmir.*
she.DAT liked.3P.PL men-the.NOM
‘She liked the men.’

Observe that the criteria used to define subjects and objects in Icelandic are behavioral (Andrews 1976, Thráinsson 1979, Zaenen, Maling & Thráinsson 1985, and later research), something which has uncovered that there are non-nominative case-marked arguments that behave syntactically as subjects in Icelandic (1b), and that there are nominative arguments that behave syntactically as objects (1b).

Icelandic uses 3rd person singular agreement (neuter, where gender is distinguished) for non-prototypical subjects, like the afore-mentioned oblique subjects, infinitival subjects, expletive subjects, etc., as is well known crosslinguistically (cf. Corbett 1991: 204):

- (2a) *Henni líkaði matur-inn.*
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.’

If an oblique subject predicate, however, selects for a nominative object, then the verb agrees with the nominative, as shown in (1b), meaning that default agreement is only found with oblique subject predicates in case there is no nominative argument. 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*). Moreover, examples of 3rd person singular default agreement have started appearing in Icelandic in cases where the nominative object is in the plural form, and one would thus expect the 3rd person plural form and not the 3rd personal singular default form (Thráinsson 1979, Andrews 1990, Sigurðsson 1996):

- (3a) ... *ef henni líkar þeir.*
 if she.DAT likes.3P.SG they.NOM
 ‘... if she likes them.’
- (3b) ... *henni leiðist fjöll og landslag.*
 she.DAT bores.3P.SG mountains.NOM and landscape.NOM
 ‘... she finds mountains and landscape boring.’

The noun phrase in Icelandic is structured in such a way that adjectives usually precede nouns, as shown in Tables 1–3 above, although adjectival elements may also follow nouns when the noun is definite, for instance the afore-mentioned suffixed definite article (see Table 2). Icelandic also exhibits structures with a free definite article, which precedes both the noun and its preposed modifying adjective, shown at the bottom of Table 3. The free definite article only occurs if there is an adjective modifying the noun. Structures with a preposed definite article are regarded as formal, while structures with the suffixed definite article, as in the middle of Table 3, may be used in both formal and informal contexts. And finally, there is no indefinite article in Icelandic.

Table 3: The Internal Structure of the Noun Phrase

Indef.	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

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 4.

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, 2011a, Barðdal & Eythórsson 2009).

Table 4: 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

Consider now a list of 112 meanings, their lexical manifestations, case frame and most common alternations in Icelandic, given in Table 5., where “–” stands for ‘does not occur’, “–/+” stands for ‘occurs marginally’ and “+” stands for ‘occurs regularly’. The Icelandic dataset consists of 112 meanings, as additional predicates with noncanonical case marking have been added to the set. The alternations listed in the table are the oblique ambitransitive and the mediopassive alternation, of which the latter has three different subconstructions, namely the impersonal (modal) mediopassive, the regular (middle) mediopassive, and finally the reflexive/reciprocal mediopassive. These will be further discussed in Section 5 below. The oblique ambitransitive alternates with a set of transitive verbs, with the subject of the intransitive alternant maintaining the case marking of the object of the transitive alternant, be it accusative, dative or genitive, without any change in verbal morphology. The oblique ambitransitive will be further discussed in Section 6 below.

Table 5: Valency Frames: Summary

Meaning	Verb	Valency Frame	Oblique Ambitr.	Impers. Medio- passive	Medio- passive (middle)	Refl/Rcp Alt.
EAT	<i>borða</i>	1.nom 2.acc	–	–	–	–
HUG	<i>faðma</i>	1.nom 2.acc	–	–	–	+
LOOK AT	<i>horfa</i>	1.nom á+2.acc	–	–	–	+
LOOK AT	<i>líta</i>	1.nom á+2.acc	–	–	–	–
SEE	<i>sjá</i>	1.nom 2.acc	–/+	+	+	+
SMELL	<i>finna lykt</i>	1.nom af+2.dat	–	+	+	–
FEAR	<i>vera hræddur</i>	1.nom við+2.acc	–	–	–	–
FRIGHTEN	<i>hræða</i>	1.nom 2.acc	–	–	+	–
LIKE	<i>líka</i>	1.dat 2.nom	–	–	–	–
KNOW	<i>þekkja</i>	1.nom 2.acc	–	–	+	+
THINK	<i>hugsa</i>	1.nom um+2.acc	–	–	–	–
SEARCH FOR	<i>leita</i>	1.nom að+2.dat	–	–	–	–
WASH	<i>þvo</i>	1.nom 2.dat	–	–	+	–
DRESS	<i>klæða</i>	1.nom 2.acc (í+3.acc)	–	–	+	–
SHAVE	<i>raka</i>	1.nom 2.acc	–	–	–	–
HELP	<i>hjálpa</i>	1.nom 2.dat	–	–	–	+
FOLLOW	<i>elta</i>	1.nom 2.acc	–	–	–	–
FOLLOW	<i>fylgja</i>	1.nom 2.dat	–	–	–	+
MEET	<i>hitta</i>	1.nom 2.acc	–	–	–	+
TALK	<i>tala</i>	1.nom við+2.acc	–	–	–	+

ASK FOR	<i>biðja (1)</i>	<i>um+3.acc</i> 1.nom (2.acc)	–	–	–	–
SHOUT AT TELL	<i>hrópa</i>	<i>um+3.acc</i> 1.nom <i>á+2.acc</i>	–	–	–	+
SAY	<i>segja</i>	1.nom UTT2 <i>við+3.acc</i>	–	–	–	–
NAME	<i>nefna</i>	1.nom UTT2 <i>við+3.acc</i> 1.nom 2.acc	–	–	+	–
NAME	<i>kalla</i>	3.acc 1.nom 2.acc	–	–	+	+
BUILD	<i>byggja</i>	3.acc 1.nom 2.acc	–	–	+	–
BREAK	<i>brjóta</i>	<i>úr+3.dat</i> 1.nom 2.acc	+	–	–	+
KILL	<i>drepa</i>	(<i>méð+3.dat</i>) 1.nom 2.acc	+	–	+	–
KILL	<i>deyða</i>	(<i>méð+3.dat</i>) 1.nom 2.acc	–	–	–	–
BEAT	<i>lemja</i>	(<i>méð+3.dat</i>) 1.nom 2.acc	–	–	+	–
HIT	<i>slá</i>	(<i>méð+3.dat</i>) 1.nom 2.acc	–	–	+	+
TOUCH	<i>snerta</i>	1.nom 2.acc	–	–	–	+
CUT	<i>skera</i>	1.nom 2.acc (<i>méð+3.dat</i>)	–	–	+	–
TAKE	<i>taka</i>	1.nom 2.acc <i>af+3.dat</i>	+	–	–	–
TEAR	<i>rífa</i>	1.nom 2.acc <i>úr+3.dat</i>	+	–	–	+
PEEL	<i>taka</i>	1.nom 2.acc <i>af+3.dat</i>	+	–	–	–
HIDE	<i>felja</i>	1.nom 2.acc <i>fyrir+3.dat</i>	–	–	–	–
SHOW	<i>sýna</i>	1.nom 2.dat 3.acc	–	–	–	–
GIVE	<i>gefa</i>	1.nom 2.dat 3.acc	+	–	–	–
GIVE	<i>rétta</i>	1.nom 2.dat 3.acc	–	–	–	–
SEND	<i>senda</i>	1.nom 2.acc (<i>til+3.gen</i>)	–	–	+	–
CARRY	<i>bera (1)</i>	1.nom 2.acc <i>á+3.acc</i>	+	–	–	–
THROW	<i>kasta</i>	1.nom 2.dat (<i>inn</i>) <i>um+3.acc</i>	+	–	+	–
TIE	<i>binda</i>	1.nom 2.acc (<i>méð+3.dat</i>) (<i>við+4.acc</i>)	–	–	+	+
PUT	<i>setja</i>	1.nom 2.acc <i>á+3.acc</i>	–	–	–	+
POUR	<i>hella</i>	1.nom 2.dat <i>í+3.acc</i>	–	–	+	–
COVER	<i>þekja</i>	1.nom 2.acc (<i>méð+3.dat</i>)	–	–	–	–
COVER	<i>breiða</i>	1.nom 2.acc <i>yfir+3.acc</i>	–	–	–	–
FILL	<i>fylla</i>	1.nom 2.acc	+	–	+	–

LOAD	<i>hlaða</i>	(<i>af</i> +3.dat) 1.nom 2.dat <i>á</i> +3.acc	+	–	+	–
BLINK	<i>blikka</i> (<i>augnum</i>)	1.nom	–	–	–	–
COUGH	<i>hósta</i>	1.nom	–	–	+	–
CLIMB	<i>klífra</i>	1.nom (<i>upp</i> +)2.acc	–	–	–	–
RUN	<i>hlaupa</i>	1.nom	–	+	+	–
SIT	<i>síja</i>	1.nom (<i>á</i> +2.dat)	–	–	–	–
SIT DOWN	<i>setjast</i>	1.nom (<i>á</i> +2.acc)	–	+	–	–
JUMP	<i>hoppa</i>	1.nom	–	–	–	–
SING	<i>syngja</i>	1.nom	–	–	–	–
GO	<i>fara</i>	1.nom (<i>á</i> +2.acc)	–	–	–	–
LEAVE	<i>yfirgefa</i>	1.nom 2.acc	–	–	–	–
LIVE	<i>búa</i>	1.nom <i>í</i> +2.dat	–	–	–	–
LAUGH	<i>hlæja</i>	1.nom	–	–	–	–
SCREAM	<i>öskra</i>	1.nom	–	–	–	+
FEEL PAIN	<i>vera illt</i>	1.dat <i>í</i> +2.dat	–	–	–	–
FEEL COLD	<i>vera kalt</i>	1.dat	–	–	–	–
DIE	<i>deyja</i>	1.nom	–	–	–	–
PLAY	<i>leika</i>	1.nom	–	–	–	+
BE SAD	<i>vera</i>	1.nom	–	–	–	–
BE HUNGRY	<i>sorgmæddur</i> <i>vera svangur</i>	(<i>yfir</i> +2.dat) 1.nom	–	–	–	–
BE HUNGRY	<i>hungra</i>	1.acc V	–	–	–	–
ROLL	<i>rúlla</i>	1.nom	–	–	+	–
SINK	<i>sökkva</i>	1.nom	–	–	–	–
BURN	<i>brenna</i>	1.nom	–	–	+	–
BE DRY	<i>vera þurr</i>	1.nom	–	–	–	–
RAIN	<i>rigna</i>	1.EXPL	–	–	–	–
BE A HUNTER	<i>vera</i> <i>veiðimaður</i>	1.nom	–	–	–	–
GRIND	<i>mala</i>	1.nom 2.acc (<i>méð</i> +dat)	–	–	+	–
WIPE	<i>þurrka</i>	1.nom 2.acc (<i>af</i> +dat)	–	–	+	–
DRY	<i>þurrka</i>	1.nom 2.acc (<i>af</i> +3.dat)	–	–	+	–
DIG	<i>grafa</i>	1.nom <i>eftir</i> +2.dat	–	–	+	–
PUSH	<i>ýta</i>	1.nom 2.dat <i>í</i> 3.acc	–	–	–	–
BRING	<i>færa</i>	1.nom 2.dat 3.acc	–	–	+	–
STEAL	<i>stela</i>	1.nom 2.dat (<i>frá</i> +3.dat)	–	–	–	–
TEACH	<i>kenna</i>	1.nom 2.dat 3.acc	–	–	–	–
HEAR	<i>heyra</i>	1.nom <i>í</i> +2.dat	–	+	+	–
COOK	<i>elda</i>	1.nom 2.acc	–	–	–	–
BOIL	<i>sjóða</i>	1.nom	–	–	+	–
BE ILL	<i>vera veikur</i>	1.nom	–	–	–	–

GET	<i>berast</i>	1.dat 2.nom (frá+3.dat)	–	–	–	–
GET	<i>gefá</i>	1.nom 2.dat 3.acc	+	–	–	–
CUT (with scissors)	<i>klíppa</i>	1.nom 2.acc	–	–	+	–
DRIVE OUT	<i>reka</i>	1.nom 2.acc	+	–	–	+
FEEL	<i>sækja syfja</i>	1.acc 2.nom	–	–	–	–
SLEEPY						
DREAM	<i>dreyma</i>	1.acc 2.acc	–	–	–	–
FEEL SICK	<i>vera óglatt</i>	1.dat	–	–	–	–
PROPOSE (a marriage)	<i>biðja (2)</i>	1.nom 2.gen	–	–	–	–
LONG FOR	<i>þýsa</i>	1.acc 2.gen	–	–	–	–
CAPSIZE	<i>hvolfa</i>	1.dat	+	–	+	–
STUMBLE	<i>skrika fótur</i>	1.dat 2.nom	–	–	–	–
SAY (impersonal)	<i>geta</i>	1.gen (t+2.dat)	+	–	–	–
MAKE ONE'S PRESENCE KNOWN	<i>verða vart</i>	1.gen	–	–	–	–
BE NEEDED	<i>vera þörf</i>	1.gen 2.nom	–	–	–	–
DESERVE	<i>bera (2)</i>	1.dat 2.nom	–	–	–	–
HAVE ON ONE'S MIND	<i>búa hugur í brjósti</i>	1.dat 2.nom	–	–	–	–
BE BURDENED	<i>brenna fyrir brjósti</i>	1.dat 2.nom	–	–	–	–
HAVE INTUITION	<i>segja hugur um</i>	1.dat	–	–	–	–/+
BE GLAD	<i>hlæja hugur í brjósti</i>	1.nom	–	–	–	–
BE SHOWE- RED WITH HAVE EVERY- THING	<i>rigna</i>	1.dat (yfir 2.acc)	–	–	–	–
GOING	<i>leika allt í lyndi</i>	1.dat 2.nom	–	–	–	–
SETTLE	<i>slá niður</i>	1.nom 2.dat	+	–	–	–
GET EXCITED	<i>hlaupa kapp í kinn</i>	1.dat	–	–	–	–

I now turn to a description of one-place, two-place and three-place predicates in Icelandic, first discussing the Nominative Subject Construction (3.1), then the Oblique Subject Construction and its three subconstructions (3.2) and finally three-place predicates (3.3).

3.1 The Nominative Subject Construction

Within the nominative-subject pattern, the one-place Nom-only exists in uncountable amount, and is certainly the default pattern with one-place predicates. Of the two-place predicates, 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 6 from Barðdal (2008: 60).

I have carried out an investigation of the lexical semantic verb classes which instantiate 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 6 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. Even though this is a small corpus, it is well stratified, and should as such be a good representative of a cross section of the modern Icelandic language.

Table 6: 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

The analysis is based on fine-grained lexical semantic verb classes; the predicates instantiating the Nom-Acc construction may be divided into 45 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). In the list below, one example verb from Icelandic is given for each semantic class:

Nom-Acc

1. Verbs of attaching and detaching (*binda* ‘tie’)
2. Verbs of attempting (*prófa* ‘try’)
3. Verbs of building and handicraft (*byggja* ‘build’)
4. Verbs of choosing and electing (*velja* ‘choose’)
5. Verbs of cognition and mental activity (*skilja* ‘understand’)
6. Verbs of commencement (*hefja* ‘begin’)
7. Verbs of creation and reshaping (*mynda* ‘form’)
8. Verbs of (means of) cutting (*skera* ‘cut’)
9. Verbs of decorating (*prýða* ‘decorate’)
10. Verbs of (de)limitation (*marka* ‘demarcate’)
11. Verbs of delivering (*rétta* ‘hand over’)
12. Verbs of destruction (*brjóta* ‘break’)
13. Verbs of discussing (*fullyrða* ‘claim’)
14. Verbs of displaying (*sýna* ‘show’)

Nom-Dat

1. Verbs of attendance and helping (*hjálpa* ‘help’)
2. Verbs of attributing (*eigna* ‘attribute’)
3. Verbs of comparison and equality (*líkjast* ‘resemble’)
4. Verbs of compensating (*gefa* ‘give’)
5. Verbs of connection (*tengjast* ‘connect, become related’)
6. Verbs of controlling (*stjórna* ‘control’)
7. Verbs of (perceived) covertness and danger (*vera hulið* ‘be hidden’)
8. Verbs of defending (*verjast* ‘defend’)
9. Verbs of destruction (*eyða* ‘destroy’)
10. Verbs of division (*deila* ‘share’)
11. Verbs of (caused) emotion (*koma á óvart* ‘surprise’)
12. Verbs of ending and finishing (*loka* ‘close’)
13. Verbs of eyeing (*blikka* ‘wink’)
14. Verbs of greeting and welcoming

15. Verbs of doing and producing (*framleiða* ‘produce’)
 16. Verbs of dwelling and stationary position (*gista* ‘stay the night’)
 17. Verbs of (caused) emotion (*óttast* ‘fear’)
 18. Verbs of feeding and consumption (*borða* ‘eat’)
 19. Verbs of formal communication (*ávarpa* ‘address’)
 20. Verbs of funding and finances (*borga* ‘pay’)
 21. Verbs of (means of) gaining (*erfa* ‘inherit’)
 22. Verbs of heating and illumination (*kveikja* ‘lighten’)
 23. Verbs of human disposition (*eiga til* ‘tend to’)
 24. Verbs of increasing and strengthening (*efla* ‘strengthen’)
 25. Verbs of letting (*láta* ‘let’)
 26. Verbs of human manipulation (*fela* ‘hide’)
 27. Verbs of measurement (*vega* ‘weigh’)
 28. Verbs of meeting and uniting (*hitta* ‘meet’)
 29. Verbs of non-translational motion (*hrista* ‘shake’)
 30. Verbs of perception and arousal (*heyra* ‘hear’)
 31. Verbs of (direct) physical affectedness (*slá* ‘hit’)
 32. Verbs of possession (*eiga* ‘own’)
 33. Verbs of practicing and attending (*iðka* ‘practice’)
 34. Verbs of preparing (*undirbúa* ‘prepare’)
 35. Verbs of putting (*setja* ‘put’)
 36. Verbs of recuperation (*hvíla* ‘rest’)
 37. Verbs of slandering (*sverta* ‘disparage’)
 38. Verbs of taking and fetching (*taka* ‘take’)
 39. Verbs of catching and termination (*stöðva* ‘stop’)
 40. Verbs of transfer (*bera* ‘carry’)
 41. Verbs of translational motion and (means of) traveling (*ösla* ‘wade’)
 42. Verbs of utilizing (*nota* ‘use’)
 43. Verbs of (interactive) verbal behavior (*biðja* ‘ask’)
15. Verbs of habitude (*venjast* ‘get used to’)
 16. Verbs of handling (*beita* ‘apply’)
 17. Verbs of increase (*ffölga* ‘increase’)
 18. Verbs of instructing (*kenna* ‘teach’)
 19. Verbs of losing (*glata* ‘lose’)
 20. Verbs of marrying (*giftast* ‘marry’)
 21. Verbs of (caused) motion (*kasta* ‘throw’)
 22. Verbs of non-translational motion (*hampa* ‘hold up’)
 23. Verbs of obeying (*lúta* ‘obey’)
 24. Verbs of obtaining and maintaining (*ná* ‘obtain’)
 25. Verbs of organizing (*skipa* ‘order’)
 26. Verbs of persistence and daring (*fá framgengt* ‘get one’s will through’)
 27. Verbs of puttering (*dunda* ‘putter’)
 28. Verbs of readiness and equipment (*vera búinn* ‘be equipped’)
 29. Verbs of stealing (*stela* ‘steal’)
 30. Verbs of thinking and meaning (*vera sammála* ‘agree’)
 31. Verbs of trusting (*trúa* ‘believe’)
 32. Verbs of (means of) verbal communication (*segja* ‘tell’)
 33. Other miscellaneous verbs
- Nom-Gen**
1. Verbs of asking and wishing (*biðjast* ‘ask for’)
 2. Verbs of cognition (*gæta* ‘take into consideration’)
 3. Verbs of emotion (*sakna* ‘miss’)
 4. Verbs of social influence (*njóta hylli* ‘be popular’)
 5. Other miscellaneous verbs

44. Verbs of (verbal) creation (*þýða*
‘translate’)
45. Verbs of warfare and heroism (*sigra*
‘conquer’)

Of the 45 narrowly-defined Nom-Acc classes, 15 are represented by the verbs in Table 5, i.e. *binda* ‘tie’, *byggja* ‘build’, *brenna* ‘burn’, *skera* ‘cut’, *brjóta* ‘break’, *sýna* ‘show’, *óttast* ‘fear’, *fela* ‘hide’, *hitta* ‘meet’, *heyra* ‘hear’, *slá* ‘hit’, *setja* ‘put’, *taka* ‘take’, *bera* ‘carry’ and *biðja* ‘ask’. Impressionistically when all the 45 verb classes are taken together, one can say that the predicates instantiating the Nom-Acc construction appear as being more agentive or express a higher degree of affectedness than the predicates instantiating the Nom-Dat construction.

Of the predicates instantiating the Nom-Dat construction in Icelandic, seven are found in Table 5 above, namely *hjálpa* ‘help’, *gefa* ‘give’, *blikka* ‘wink’, *kenna* ‘teach’, *kasta* ‘throw’, *stela* ‘steal’ and *segja* ‘tell’. With some well-defined exceptions, it seems that Nom-Dat predicates in Icelandic 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 7, which shows that 45% of datives with Nom-Dat predicates are animate, while similar figures for the accusative with Nom-Acc predicates and the genitive with Nom-Gen predicates are 26 vs. 21%, respectively.

Table 7: 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

Before proceeding to the Oblique Subject Construction in Icelandic, it is opportune to mention that the three different subconstructions of the Nominative Subject Construction, Nom-Acc, Nom-Dat and Nom-Gen, also alternate with different subconstructions of the Passive Construction in Icelandic. Not unexpectedly, the Nom-Acc predicates alternate with the Nominative Passive, the Nom-Dat predicates with the Dative Passive and the Nom-Gen predicates with the Genitive Passive. This is a regular and productive alternation in Icelandic (see Section 5 below).

With regard to both the Oblique Ambitransitive alternation and the Mediopassive alternation, they target Nom-Acc, Nom-Dat and Nom-Gen predicates alike. In other words, Nom-Acc, Nom-Dat and Nom-Gen predicates are subject to both the Oblique Ambitransitive alternation and the Mediopassive alternation in Icelandic, showing that there does not seem to be any interference from case marking on these alternations.

3.2 The Oblique Subject Construction

The Oblique Subject Construction divides into three subconstructions in Icelandic, namely Accusative, Dative and Genitive Subject Constructions. They differ first and foremost with regard to the case marking of the subject. A close scrutiny reveals that there is a major semantic overlap between the Accusative and the Dative Subject Constructions (Barðdal 2011a). This has resulted in a process called Dative Sickness, in which 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 (*líka* ‘like’)
2. Verbs of dislike (*mislíka* ‘dislike’)
3. Verbs of longing (*leika hugur á* ‘want’)
4. Verbs of enjoyment/happiness (*hlæja hugur í brjósti* ‘be glad’)
5. Verbs of feeling/experiencing (*líða* ‘feel’)
6. Verbs expressing fear/danger (*standa ógn af* ‘fear’)
7. Verbs denoting suffering/distress (*vera mikið í mun* ‘be anxious’)
8. Verbs expressing anger/irritation (*svella móður* ‘become angry’)
9. Verbs of boredom/tiredness (*leiðast* ‘be bored’)
10. Verbs expressing relieve/ease (*létta* ‘be relieve’)
11. Verbs expressing burden/load (*vera vandi á höndum* ‘have problems’)
12. Verbs of sorrow/sadness (*taka sárt* ‘be sorry’)
13. Verbs of pain (*sárna* ‘become sore’)
14. Verbs of shame (*vera skömm að* ‘be of shame’)
15. Verbs of care (*vera umhugað um* ‘care’)
16. Verbs expressing hope/wish (*verða að ósk sinni* ‘have one’s wish come true’)

Verbs of Perception:

17. Verbs of perception (*heyra* ‘hear’)

Verbs of Gain:

18. Verbs of benefit (*berast* ‘receive’)
19. Verbs of growing (*vaxa skegg* ‘grow beard’)

Verbs of Bodily States:

26. Verbs expressing bodily temperature (*vera kalt* ‘freeze’)
27. Verbs of getting better/worse (of illness) (*batna* ‘get better’)
28. Verbs of sleeping/being unconscious (*sortna fyrir augum* ‘become unconscious’)
29. Verbs of swallowing/choking (*svelgjast á* ‘go down the wrong way’)
30. Verbs of symptoms of diseases (*vera illt* ‘feel pain’)

Verbs of Cognition

31. Verbs of thinking/beginning to think (*búa í brjósti* ‘have of one’s mind’)
32. Verbs of (in)determinacy (*talast til* ‘decide’)
33. Verbs of surprise/confusion (*koma á óvart* ‘be surprised’)
34. Verbs of knowing/change in knowledge (*greipast* ‘be stuck in sb’s mind’)
35. Verbs of agreeing/disagreeing (*sinnast* ‘have a disagreement’)

Verbs denoting Attitudes:

36. Verbs expressing sufficiency/usefulness (*gagnast* ‘be useful’)
37. Verbs expressing appropriateness/suitability (*sæma* ‘be appropriate’)

Verbs of Speaking:

38. Verbs of speaking (*hrjóta af vörum* ‘let words slip’)

Verbs of Success:

39. Verbs of success (*ganga vel* ‘go well’)

Verbs of Hindrance:

20. Verbs of impediment (*seinka* ‘get delayed’)
21. Verbs of failing (*misheppnast* ‘fail’)
22. Verbs of slipping/losing (*skrika fótur* ‘stumble’)

Verbs of Ontological States:

23. Verbs of (dis)similarity (*kippa í kynið* ‘resemble’)
24. Verbs of properties/abilities (*vera eiginlegt* ‘be innate to sb’)
25. Verbs of other ontological states (*vera farið* ‘be in a certain way’)

Verbs of Modality:

40. Verbs of obligation (*bera* ‘be obliged’)
41. Verbs of permission (*leyfast* ‘be allowed’)

Verbs of Evidentiality:

42. Verbs of seeming/appearing (*virðast* ‘seem’)

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 2011a). Consider now the classes that are found with the Accusative Subject Construction:

Verbs denoting Emotions:

1. Verbs of longing (*fýsa* ‘want, desire’)
2. Verbs of caring (*skipta* ‘care’)
3. Verbs of fear/danger (*grípa skelfing* ‘be terrified’)
4. Verbs of outrage/disgust (*bjóða við* ‘feel disgusted’)
5. Verbs of pain (*verkja* ‘have pain’)
6. Verbs of sorrow (*taka sárt* ‘feel sorry’)
7. Verbs of remorse (*iðra* ‘regret’)

Verbs of Perception:

8. Verbs of dreaming (*dreyma* ‘dream’)

Verbs denoting Attitudes:

9. Verbs expressing appropriateness/suitability (*henta* ‘suit’)

Verbs of Gain:

10. Verbs of assistance (*stoða* ‘be of help’)

Verbs of Happening:

11. Verbs of occurring (*bera að* ‘happen’)

Verbs of Bodily States:

12. Verbs expressing bodily temperature (*selja rauðan* ‘blush’)
13. Verbs of sleeping (*sakja syfja* ‘become sleepy’)
14. Verbs of symptoms of diseases (*kreppa* ‘become bent’)
15. Verbs of hunger/thirst (*hungra* ‘hunger’)
16. Verbs of bodily sensation (*killla* ‘tickle’)
17. Verbs of bodily pain (*svíða* ‘smart’)
18. Verbs of nausea (*svima* ‘feel dizzy’)

Verbs of Cognition:

19. Verbs of thinking (*óra fyrir* ‘imagine’)
20. Verbs of surprise/confusion (*furða* ‘be surprised’)
21. Verbs of knowing (*reka í vörðurnar* ‘not know the answer’)
22. Verbs of disagreeing (*greina á* ‘disagree’)

Verbs of Modality:

23. Verbs of lacking (*vanta* ‘lack’)

These narrowly-circumscribed verb classes instantiating the Accusative Subject Construction are only 23 in number while the number is 42 for the Dative Subject Construction. This means that even though the two constructions occupy the

same semantic space, the Accusative Subject Construction is considerably less well rooted in the grammar of Icelandic than the Dative Subject Construction. Or, in other words, the Accusative Subject Constructions scatters more sparsely across the semantic space than the Dative Subject Construction (cf. Barðdal 2011a).

Several of the predicates instantiating the Dative and the Accusative Subject Construction, listed above, occur in Table 5 above. There are seven dative ones, namely *líka* ‘like’, *hlæja hugur í brjósti* ‘be glad’, *vera kalt* ‘freeze’, *vera illt* ‘feel pain’, *berast* ‘receive’, *skrika fótur* ‘stumble’ and *búa í brjósti* ‘have on one’s mind’. The accusative predicates are four, i.e. *fýsa* ‘want, desire’, *hungra* ‘hunger’, *dreyma* ‘dream’ and *sækja sýfja* ‘become sleepy’. Observe, also, that the predicates occurring in the Accusative and the Dative Subject Construction in Icelandic are systematically excluded from occurring in the Passive and the Mediopassive constructions.

However, the story about the Accusative Subject Construction in Icelandic is not complete: there are additional subclasses of predicates that instantiate the Accusative Subject Construction that are not found instantiating the Dative Subject Construction. That is, the Accusative Subject Construction is not a proper subset of the Dative Subject Construction, as the overlap between the two is only partial. Below I list the additional classes of verbs occurring in the Accusative Subject Construction that are not found in the Dative Subject Construction:

Verbs expressing Events in Nature and Landscape

- 24. Verbs of drifting (*reka* ‘drift’)
- 25. Verbs expression meteorological conditions (*rífa* ‘blow away’)
- 26. Verbs expressing events in nature (*brjóta* ‘get smashed’)
- 27. Verbs expressing changes in locational position (*snara af baki* ‘fall off horseback’)

Change in Time/Quantity/Space

- 28. Verbs of inception/termination (*hefja* ‘begin’)
- 29. Verbs expressing change in quantity (*stytta* ‘get shortened’)

Most of these predicates are, I believe, intransitives derived from transitive verbs. Some examples from the list of predicates in Table 5 are *reka* ‘drift’, *rífa* ‘blow away’, *brjóta* ‘get smashed’, *hefja* ‘begin’ and *stytta* ‘get shortened’. As evident from the glosses, they are lexicalized as intransitive variants of transitive verbs, and have as such been subject to the Oblique Ambitransitive alternation. Observe that 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 ambitransitive 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 non-prepositional objects divide across five different object 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 2007a). The distribution is lexically determined, although similarities and differences may be found across the patterns. Three-place predicates can only have their subjects in the nominative case.

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 ...

Examples of predicates with two non-prepositional objects in Icelandic are given in (4), of which one is listed in Table 5, namely *gefa* ‘give’, which selects for Dat-Acc in Icelandic:

- (4a) *Yfirmaðurinn gaf henni frí í dag.* Dat-Acc
 supervisor.the.NOM gave her.DAT time.off.ACC in day
 ‘The supervisor gave her the day off.’

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 2007a, Barðdal, Kristoffersen & Sveen 2011). The remaining four case patterns for ditransitives are given in (4b–e) below:

- (4b) *Hann leyndi hana engu.* Acc-Dat
 he.NOM hid her.ACC nothing.DAT
 ‘He hid nothing from her.’
- (4c) *... en hann krafði ráðuneytið svara.* Acc-Gen
 but he.NOM demanded ministry.ACC answers.GEN
 ‘... but he demanded answers from the ministry.’
- (4d) *Hann lofaði manninum vinnu hjá sér.* Dat-Dat
 he.NOM promised man.the.DAT work.DAT at him
 ‘He promised the man a job in his company.’
- (4e) *... ekki það að ég unni þeim ekki góðra launa.* Dat-Gen
 not it that I.NOM begrudge them.DAT not good.GEN salary.GEN
 ‘... not that I don’t begrudge them a good salary.’

I have not undertaken a lexical semantic analysis of the predicates instantiating the four less frequent case constructions in Modern Icelandic, i.e. Acc-Dat, Acc-Gen, Dat-Dat, Dat-Gen, although such an analysis exists for Old Norse-Icelandic (Barðdal, Kristoffersen & Sveen 2011). Let me now recapitulate the facts from Old Norse-Icelandic: 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 funds, 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 non-prepositional 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 Icelandic is thus manifested in a shrinking scope of the semantic space that these constructions occupy. Moreover, several of the predicates selecting for two non-prepositional objects in Modern Icelandic may alternate between that valency pattern and the other valency patterns with prepositional phrases, as discussed in Section 4.2 below.

There are also three-place predicates in Icelandic that select for one direct object and one prepositional object, like *biðja* ‘ask for’, *setja* ‘put’, *kasta* ‘throw’, *hella* ‘pour’, *fylla* ‘fill’, *hlaða* ‘load’ and *ýta* ‘push’ from Table 5 above:

- (5a) *Ég bað konuna um motorhjól.* Acc-PP.Acc
I.NOM asked woman.ACC about motorcycle.ACC
‘I asked my wife for a motorcycle.’
- (5b) *Dorrit setti starf sitt í biðstöðu.* Acc-PP.Acc
Dorrit.NOM put job.ACC hers.ACC in wait.ACC
‘Dorrit put her job on hold.’
- (5c) *Maðurinn kastaði þýfinu í sjóinn.* Dat-PP.Acc
man.the.NOM threw stolen.goods.DAT in sea.the.ACC
‘The man threw the stolen goods into the sea.’
- (5d) *Hann hellti bensíni á hurðina og kveikti í.* Dat-PP.Acc
he poured gas.DAT on door.the.ACC and lit in
‘He poured gas on the door and lit it.’
- (5e) *Þetta fyllti æðar mínar af endorfi.* Acc-PP.Dat
this.NOM filled veins.ACC mine.ACC of endorphin.DAT
‘This filled my veins with endorphins.’
- (5f) *Þjófurinn hlóð stórum dekkjum í skottið.* Dat-PP.Acc
thief.the.NOM loaded big.DAT tires.DAT in trunk.the.ACC
‘The thief loaded big tires into the trunk.’
- (5g) *Lögreglan ýtti höfði Grétars í gangstéttina.* Dat-PP.Acc
police.the.NOM pushed head.DAT Grétar.GEN in pavement.the.ACC
‘The police thrust Grétar’s head onto the pavement.’

There is, however, only one predicate from the list in Table 5, *tala* ‘talk’ that selects for two prepositional objects in Icelandic:

- (6) *Ég talaði við umsjónarkennarann um smá vandamál.* PP.Acc-PP.Acc
 I.NOM talked with advisor.the.ACC about some problems.ACC
 ‘I talked to my advisor about some problems.’

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 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 have also started occurring with dative subjects instead of the prescribed and the historically original accusative (Rögnauldsson 1983, Eythórsson 2000, 2002, Jónsson & Eythórsson 2005, Barðdal 2011a):

- (7a) *Mig langar alltaf á Subway*
 me.ACC longs always on Subway
 ‘I always want to go to Subway’
- (7b) *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 2011a).

The list of predicates in Table 5, of experience, cognition and perception verbs, consists mostly of nominative subject verbs like *heyra* ‘hear’, *sjá* ‘see’ and *vita* ‘know’, which do not participate in this variation, since, as stated, their subjects stand in the nominative and not accusative. Two verbs on the list in Table 5 show this varying behavior, *svima* ‘feel dizzy’ and *kitta* ‘tickle’. Some additional ones are *vanta* ‘long’, *gruna* ‘suspect’, *svíða* ‘smart’, *kleja* ‘itch’, *flökra* ‘feel nauseous’ and *klégja* ‘feel nauseous’, to mention a few.

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:

- (8a) *Ég þvoði **henni** á bak við eyrun.*
I washed her.DAT on behind with ears.the
'I washed her behind the ears.'
- (8b) *Ég þvoði **pelana** í upphvottavélinni.*
I washed bottles.the.ACC in washing.machine.the.DAT
'I washed the milk bottles in the washing machine.'
- (9a) *Ég þurrkaði **henni** um bakið, brjóstin og magann.*
I dried her.DAT of back.the.ACC, breasts.the.ACC and stomach.the.ACC
'I dried her back, breasts and stomach.'
- (9b) *Ég þurrkaði **tölvuna** hið snarasta með eldhúspappír ...*
I.NOM dried computer.the.ACC the quickest with kitchen.paper.DAT
'I immediately dried the computer with a kitchen roll ...'

This variation between accusative and dative objects, with dative being used with animate objects and accusative with non-animate objects, is limited to a handful of verbs in Icelandic, like 'wash' and 'dry' (cf. Barðdal 1993, 2001a).

Another type of case variation 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.

- (10a) *... klóraði **honum** um bakið, nuddaði á honum íljarnar ...*
scratched him.DAT of back.the.ACC, massaged on him.DAT sole.the.ACC
'... scratched his back, massaged his soles ...'
- (10b) *... björninn klóraði **hann** og beit.*
bear.the.NOM scratched him.ACC and bit
'... the bear scratched him and bit him.'

This type of case variation, however, is neither very productive nor widespread in Icelandic (cf. Barðdal 1993, 2001a). 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):

- (11a) *Agnes keyrði **mig** út á völl.*
Agnes.NOM drove me.ACC out on airport
'Agnes drove me to the airport.'
- (11b) *Mamma keyrði **mér** heim.*
Mom.NOM 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, but examples involving non-animate objects have also been reported (Barðdal 1993):

(12a) *Ég reytti af mér brandarana.*
 I.NOM ripped off me.DAT jokes.the.ACC
 ‘I ripped the jokes off.’

(12b) *Ég reytti af mér bröndurunum.*
 I.NOM ripped off me.DAT jokes.the.DAT
 ‘I ripped the jokes off.’

There is however, another pattern found in Icelandic, the Caused-Motion Construction, also involving a variation between accusative and dative objects, not motivated by animacy, which clearly speaks in favor of the general productivity of the dative as an object case in Icelandic. As this pattern also involves a change in the structure of the complement of the verb, it is discussed Section 4.2.

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, 2008: 120–125). One intransitive verb from the list in Table 5, *hósta* ‘cough’, may be used transitively, and when it does, the object selects for the dative case (see 14b below). One transitive verb from the list in Table 5, *lemja* ‘beat’, also shows variation in case marking of the object depending on whether the object occurs in the Caused-Motion Construction or in the ordinary Transitive Construction denoting affectedness (see 15).

- | | | |
|-------|---|----------------------|
| (13a) | <i>Ég kem.</i>
I.NOM come
‘I’ll come.’ | <i>Intransitive</i> |
| (13b) | <i>Ég kem þessu til þín.</i>
I.NOM come this.DAT to you.GEN
‘I’ll get this over to you.’ | <i>Caused-Motion</i> |
| (14a) | <i>Hann hóstar.</i>
he.NOM cough
‘He’s coughing.’ | <i>Intransitive</i> |
| (14b) | <i>Hann hóstaði upp þremur milljónum.</i>
he.NOM coughed up three.DAT millions.DAT
‘He managed to raise three millions’ | <i>Caused-Motion</i> |
| (15a) | <i>Hann lamdi barn!</i>
he.NOM beat child.ACC
‘He beat a child.’ | <i>Transitive</i> |
| (15b) | <i>Hann lamdi hælunum í gólfid.</i>
he.NOM beat heels.the.DAT in floor.the.ACC
‘He kicked his heels on the floor.’ | <i>Caused-Motion</i> |

When stated above that the Intransitive/Transitive alternation with the Caused-Motion Construction entails a change in structure, this means 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 1993, 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) and in later publications.

Another case and structure-changing alternation in Icelandic is the Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat Alternation (Barðdal 2001b, Eythórsson & Barðdal 2005), which works in such a way that a set of predicates selects for both the Dat-Nom and the Nom-Dat argument structures. Four predicates from the list in Table 5 show this behavior, *berast* ‘receive’, *fylgja* ‘follow, accompany’, *búa í brjósti* ‘have on one’s mind’ and *brenna fyrir brjósti* ‘be burdened’.

- (16a) **Mér** hefur aldrei borist **þessi ábending**. *Dat-Nom*
 me.DAT has never received this.NOM suggestion.NOM
 ‘I have never received this suggestion.’
- (16b) **Þessi ábending** hefur aldrei borist **mér**. *Nom-Dat*
 this.NOM suggestion.NOM has never received me.DAT
 ‘This suggestion has never found its way to me.’

Syntactic tests reveal that these are two different argument structure constructions, and that (16a), for instance, is not a topicalization of (16b), 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 seems to be the topicality of the arguments (Barðdal 2001b). 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, exactly 111 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’ (from Table 5 above) and *leiðast* ‘be bored’ are not found in a corresponding Nom-Dat construction. Notice, however, that the synonymous predicate *falla (í geð)* ‘be to one’s liking’ is found to be an alternating predicate of this type. This shows that synonymous predicates need not necessarily show identical behavior with regard to alternations.

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 either with an animate participant directing his/her attention towards the

content, or with a 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. Some examples are *birtast* ‘appear’, *bragðast* ‘taste’, *duga* ‘suffice’, *dyljast* ‘be not aware of sth’, *endast* ‘last’, *fara vel* ‘suit’, *gagnast* ‘be of use to’, *glatast* ‘be lost to’, *greypast* ‘stuck in sb’s mind’, *henta* ‘please, suit’, *hverfa* ‘be lost to sb’, *hæfa* ‘suit’, *nýtast* ‘be of use to’, *nægja* ‘suffice’, *opinberast* ‘appear in a vision’, *passa* ‘please, suit’, *reynast* ‘prove, turn out to be’, *smakkast* ‘taste’, *sóma* ‘be proper, suit’, *sækjast vel* ‘go well/badly’, *sæma* ‘be proper, suit’, *vitrast* ‘appear in vision’ and *þóknast* ‘please, suit’ (for a list of all 111 predicates, see Barðdal 2001b: 54–55).

Ditransitives with three direct or non-prepositional arguments are found to alternate between an NP-NP structure and an NP-PP structure in Icelandic. From the list in Table 5 above, we only find *senda* ‘send’ and *rétta* ‘hand over’ occurring in this alternation, while *gefa* ‘give’, *sýna* ‘show’ and *kasta* ‘throw’ do not.

(17a) *Ég sendi henni bókina.*
I.NOM send her.DAT book.the.ACC
‘I sent her the book.’

(17b) *Ég sendi bókina til hennar.*
I.NOM 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’.

(18a) *Ég gaf henni bókina.*
I.NOM gave her.DAT book.the.ACC
‘I gave her the book.’

(18b) **Ég gaf bókina til hennar.*
I.NOM gave book.the.ACC to her.GEN
‘I handed the book to her.’

In the terminology of Barðdal (2007a), 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. also 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.

Icelandic also has a Locative Alternation, typically found with verbs like *hella* ‘pour’ and *hlaða* ‘load’, listed in Table 5 above:

- (19a) *Ég hellti glasið fullt með vatni.*
 I.NOM poured glass.the.ACC full with water.DAT
 ‘I filled the glass with water.’
- (19b) *Ég hellti vatni í glasið.*
 I.NOM poured water.DAT in glass.the.ACC
 ‘I poured water into the glass.’
- (20a) *Þjófurinn hlóð skottið með dekkjum.*
 thief.the.NOM loaded trunk.the.ACC with tires.DAT
 ‘The thief loaded the trunk with tires.’
- (20b) *Þjófurinn hlóð dekkjum í skottið.*
 thief.the.NOM loaded tires.DAT in trunk.the.ACC
 ‘The thief loaded tires into the trunk.’

Here we get a variation between the location and locatum, with the location realized as either an accusative object or as an accusative-marked locative phrase, and the locatum is realized either through a dative-marked *with*-phrase or as a dative object.

Observe that some idiosyncrasies are found in the behavior of verbs which typically occur in the Locative Alternation, as *þekja* ‘cover’ does not participate in the Locative Alternation, while the verb *sprauta* ‘spray’ does:

- (21a) *Konan þakti vegginn með málningu.*
 woman.the.NOM covered wall.the.ACC with paint.DAT
 ‘The woman covered the wall with paint.’
- (21b) **Konan þakti málningu á vegginn.*
 woman.the.NOM covered paint.the.DAT on wall.the.ACC
 Intended meaning: ‘The woman spread paint on the wall.’
- (22a) *Konan sprautaði vegginn með málningu.*
 woman.the.NOM sprayed wall.the.ACC with paint.DAT
 ‘The woman sprayed the wall with paint.’
- (22b) *Konan sprautaði málningu á vegginn.*
 woman.the.NOM sprayed paint.the.DAT on wall.the.ACC
 ‘The woman sprayed paint on the wall.’

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 *borða* ‘eat’, from Table 5 above, and *lesa* ‘read’:

- (23a) *Hann borðaði ísinn.*
 he.NOM ate icecream.ACC
 ‘He ate the ice cream.’

(23b) *Hann borðaði af ísnum.*
 he.NOM ate of icecream.DAT
 ‘He ate of the ice cream.’

(24a) *Hann las blaðið.*
 he.NOM read newspaper.ACC
 ‘He read the newspaper.’

(24b) *Hann las í blaðinu.*
 he.NOM read in newspaper.DAT
 ‘He read in the newspaper.’

The Conative Alternation always involves the replacement of a direct object by 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 that is used.

4.3 Other Non-coded Alternations

Meteorological verbs do not select for a grammatical subject in Icelandic, as shown in (25) below. The element corresponding to ‘it’ in (25a) is an expletive, and not an argument, as it is not found in clauses containing subject-verb inversion, shown in (25b). Hence it does not invert with the verb, as would be expected from an ordinary behavioral subject:

(25a) *Það rigndi í gær.*
 it rained in yesterday
 ‘It rained yesterday.’

(25b) *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’, without any apparent change in meaning:

(26) *Hann fór loksins að rigna í gær.*
 he.NOM went lastly to rain 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). Hence, it counts as an argument of the predicate.

(27) *Þá fór hann loksins að rigna.*
 then went he.NOM lastly to rain
 ‘Then at last it began to rain.’

The last uncoded alternation to be discussed here involves object omission. Icelandic is neither a pro-drop 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 (28) below, or when it is general enough to be left unexpressed (cf. Goldberg 2005). This is typically found with verbs meaning ‘give’, ‘eat’, ‘drink’ and others like that, of which both *gefa* ‘give’ and *borða* ‘eat’ are found on the verb list in Table 5 above:

- (28) *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, as in (29) below (see also ex. 10b above):

- (29) *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, i.e. objects shared across coordinated phrases, 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 Transitive–Inchoative Alternation, which is highly lexicalized and only found with a handful of 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. The examples below illustrate this with three different verbs from the list in Table 5, *segja* ‘say’, *kasta* ‘throw’ and *leita* ‘search for’:

- (30a) **Sagan** var sögð aftur og aftur. Nom. Passive (with acc. object verbs)
 story.the.NOM was told again and again
 ‘The story was told again and again.’
- (30b) **Handsprengru** var kastað að kirkju. Dative Passive (with dat. object verbs)
 hand.grenade.DAT was thrown at church.DAT
 ‘Hand grenade was thrown towards a church.’
- (30c) **Hans** var leitað lengi. Genitive Passive (with gen. object verbs)
 he.GEN was looked.for long
 ‘He was searched for for a long time.’

Only agentive predicates may participate in this alternation; as already stated above, 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). This means that several of the verb classes occurring in the Nom-Acc and Nom-Dat constructions cannot be passivized. These are, for Nom-Acc verbs, some verbs of cognition and mental activities, some verbs of (caused) emotion, some verbs expressing means of gaining, like acquisition verbs, verbs of human disposition, and verbs of possession. And for Nom-Dat verbs, some verbs of comparison and equality, verbs of connection, verbs of losing, and verbs of marrying do not participate in the Active–Passive alternation.

Ditransitive verbs also participate in the Active–Passive Alternation. Of the list in Table 5, the verbs *gefa* ‘give’, *sýna* ‘show’ and *senda* ‘send’ show this behavior. In fact, these predicates have a choice between two different subconstructions of the Passive Construction, namely Dat-Nom and Nom-Dat. In other words, these are also alternating, exactly like the active *berast* ‘receive’, *fylgja* ‘follow, accompany’, *búa í brjósti* ‘have on one’s mind’ and *brenna fyrir brjósti* ‘be burdened’, discussed in Section 4.2 above.

- (31a) *Mér voru gefin góð ráð í gær.*
me.DAT were given good.NOM advice.NOM in yesterday
‘I was given some good advice yesterday.’
- (31b) *Gömlu síloin voru gefin Akureyrarbæ.*
old.NOM silos.NOM were given Akureyri.town.DAT
‘The old silos were donated to Akureyri municipal.’
- (32a) *Einum hópnunum voru sýndar myndir af...*
one.DAT group.DAT were shown pictures.NOM of
‘One of the groups was shown pictures of ...’
- (32b) *Auglýsingarnar voru sýndar gestunum og...*
ads.the.NOM were shown guests.the.DAT and
‘The ads were shown to the guests ...’
- (33a) *Þeim voru sendar hlýjar kveðjur.*
they.DAT were sent warm.NOM greetings.NOM
‘They were sent some warm greetings.’
- (33b) *Verklagsreglurnar voru sendar öllum hlutaðeigandi*
work.procedure.rules.the.NOM were sent every.DAT relevant.party.DAT
í lok árs 2006.
in end.ACC year.GEN 2006
‘The work precedures were sent to all concerned at the end of the year 2006.’

Recall that subjects in Icelandic invert with the verb when other material occurs in first position. No such subject–verb inversion is found above. Instead, the subject occurs preverbally and the object occurs following the verb phrase. For a further discussion about such alternating passives, cf. Sigurðsson (1990–91).

Passives can also be formed with intransitive predicates, the so-called Impersonal Passive. It allegedly occurs only with unergatives like *dansa* ‘dance’. (Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir 1997), which is different from the ordinary passive, where only agentive predicates are found. However, I find examples with unaccusatives fully grammatical in the Impersonal Passive construction (cf. also Barðdal & Molnár 2003, Barðdal 2007b, Eythórsson 2008, Jónsson 2009):

- (34a) *Jæja allavega, það var keppt og svoleiðis, og í millitíðinni*
 well at.least it was competed and such and in meantime.DAT
var króknað úr kulda.
 was died from cold.DAT
 ‘Well, at least, we participated in the competition, and all that, and in between the games, people **were freezing** to death.’
- (34b) *Hér var legið á meltunni í náttfötunum fínu.*
 here was laid on digestion.DAT in pyjamas.the.DAT fine.DAT
 ‘Here we **lie**, engorged, wearing the nice pyjamas.’

In (34) the unaccusative predicates *krókna úr kulda* ‘freeze to death’ and *liggja á meltunni* ‘be engorged’ occur in the Impersonal Passive Construction without these examples resulting in ungrammaticality. But given that alternations in Icelandic are generally not sensitive to the unergative–unaccusative distinction, any lack of an ungrammaticality effect with examples like the ones in (34) is unsurprising (although Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir 2002 argue that there is an ongoing change in Icelandic, and that the construction is in the process of being extended from unergatives to unaccusatives). An extension of the Impersonal Passive to transitive predicates, which I chose to call the *Actional Passive* will be further discussed in Section 6 below.

Icelandic also has a Mediopassive Construction, which is a highly polysemous category in Icelandic encompassing reflexive meanings, reciprocal meanings, middles, as well as deponents (cf. Anderson 1990, Ottósson 1992, Barðdal & Molnár 2003). The Mediopassive Construction is manifested in an *-st*, originally the reflexive *sik* ‘self’, contracted to *-sk*, which then later in the history of Icelandic changed to *-st*, suffixed on the verbal stem.

- (35a) *Hann settist.* Reflexive
 he.NOM sat.MED
 ‘He sat down.’
- (35b) *Þau hittust.* Reciprocal
 they.NOM met.MED
 ‘They met (each other).’
- (35c) *Hann grófst undir snjónum* Middle
 he.NOM buried.MED under snow.the.DAT
í snjóflóðinu.
 in avalanche.the.DAT
 ‘He got buried under the snow during the avalanche’

- (35d) *Hann andaðist.* Deponent
 he.NOM breathed.MED
 ‘He died.’

The category of deponent verbs is fully 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, i.e. anticausatives, and it stands in a paradigmatic opposition to the category of active and the category of passive (cf. Ottósson 1992).

As evident from Table 5 above, several predicates in Icelandic occur in the Mediopassive Construction (with a suffixed *-st* on the verb):

- a) Reciprocals: *hitta* ‘meet’, *faðma* ‘hug’, *horfa* ‘watch’, *sjá* ‘see’, *þekkja* ‘know’, *hjálpa* ‘help’, *fylgja* ‘accompany’, *tala* ‘talk’, *hrópa* ‘shout’, *slá* ‘hit’, *snerta* ‘touch’, *binda* ‘tie’, *öskra* ‘scream’, *leika* ‘play’ and *reka* ‘drift’.
- b) Reflexives: *segja* ‘say’, *klæða* ‘dress’, *kalla* ‘name’, *nefna* ‘name’, *brjóta* ‘break’, *drepa* ‘kill’, *lenja* ‘beat’, *brenna* ‘burn’, and *setja* ‘sit’.
- c) Middles/Anticausatives: *sjá* ‘see’, *hræða* ‘scare’, *finna lykt* ‘smell’, *þvo* ‘wash’, *byggja* ‘build’, *skera* ‘cut’, *kasta* ‘throw’, *hella* ‘pour’, *fylla* ‘fill’, *hlaða* ‘pile’, *hlaupa* ‘run’, *hósta* ‘cough’, *rúlla* ‘roll’, *mala* ‘grind’, *þurrka* ‘dry’, *grafa* ‘dig’, *ýta* ‘push’, *heyra* ‘hear’, *elda* ‘cook’, *sjóða* ‘boil’, *hvolfa* ‘capsize’.

Not only transitive verbs are subject to this kind of detransitivization in Icelandic, but also ditransitive verbs. This applies to both *sýna* ‘show’ and *gefa* ‘give’ from Table 5 above:

- (36a) *Ég sýndi þeim það.* Three-place
 I.NOM showed them.DAT it.ACC
 ‘I showed it to them.’
- (36b) *Þeim sýndi-st það.* Two-place
 they.DAT showed-st it.NOM
 ‘As far as they could see it.’
- (37a) *Ég gaf þeim tækifæri.* Three-place
 I.NOM gave them.DAT chance.ACC
 ‘I gave them a chance.’
- (37b) *Þeim gaf-st tækifæri.* Two-place
 they.DAT gave-st chance.NOM
 ‘They got a chance.’

Observe that the detransitized variant partly keeps the case marking of the two remaining arguments from the ditransitive variant; the dative from the ditransitive keeps its dative case, while the argument corresponding to the accusative of the ditransitive variant shows up in the nominative case in the transitive variant. This reduction in valency is concomitant with a change in the form of the verb, namely the addition of an *-st* suffix (see next section for a different type of

detransitivization process in Icelandic which does not result in change in the verbal form).

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

- (38) *Það sást til hans í skóginum.*
 it saw.MED 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 Transitive–Inchoative Alternation (cf. Ottósson 2013, Cennamo, Eythórsson & Barðdal 2014), where the transitive variant is marked with umlaut, while the intransitive inchoative variant is marked on the verb with the suffix *-na*, with or without umlaut on the stem vowel:

- (39a) *Ég reif kjólinn í látunum.*
 I.NOM tore dress.the.ACC in tumult.the.DAT
 ‘I tore the dress during the tumult.’

- (39b) *Kjóllinn rifnaði í látunum.*
 dress.the.NOM tore in tumult.the.DAT
 ‘The dress tore during the tumult.’

- (40) *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 (40) above (cf. Cennamo, Eythórsson & Barðdal 2014). As discussed by Ottósson (2013), it is fairly widespread in the Icelandic lexicon. In addition to *rifna* ‘tear’, the verb *brotna* ‘break’ from the list in Table 5 also occurs in this construction.

6. Additional Icelandic Peculiarities

In this section I will present two alternations in Icelandic that have been regarded as specific for Icelandic, the Oblique Ambitransitive 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 considerable attention in the literature during the last decade or so.

Beginning with the ambitransitive, Icelandic has an ordinary ambitransitive construction consisting of ambitransitive or labile predicates which can either be transitive or intransitive. An example of this variation is given in (41):

- (41) *Ég sýð vatnið.* vs. *Vatnið sýður.*
 I.NOM boil water.the.ACC water.the.NOM boils
 ‘I boil the water.’ ‘The water boils.’

Notice that the intransitive variant has the subject in the nominative case, which is what is common crosslinguistically for ambitransitive/labile verbs of this sort. It has been argued (Ottósson 2013) that this alternation is not very common in Icelandic, and in fact, it is only *sjóða* ‘boil’ from the list in Table 5 that shows this behavior.

In addition to this type of ambitransitives, Icelandic also has what I choose to call the Oblique Ambitransitive Construction, where the verb is not coded, as is the case for anticausatives, but the subject argument is coded (cf. also Maling & Zaenen 1990). Examples are given in (42–44) below, with accusatives, dative and genitives, respectively:

- (42) Accusative
*Ég sá **veginn** óglögg.* vs. ***Veginn** sá öglögg.*
 I.NOM saw road.the.ACC unclearly vs. road.the.ACC saw unclearly
 ‘I didn’t see the road clearly.’ vs. ‘The road could hardly be seen.’
- (43) Dative
*Ég hleð niður **börnum*** vs. ***Snjónum** hleður niður.*
 I.NOM load down children.the.DAT vs. snow.the.DAT loads down
 ‘I pile up children’ vs. ‘The snow piles up.’
 or ‘I have a lot of children’
- (44) Genitive
*Ég gat **þess** í bréfinu.* vs. ***Þess** gat í bréfinu.*
 I.NOM mentioned it.GEN in letter vs. it.GEN mentioned in letter
 ‘I mentioned it in the letter.’ vs. ‘It was mentioned in the letter.’

Observe that the subject case of the intransitive 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 intransitive variant is also in the accusative, etc. This means that the subject case marking of the intransitive is dependent on the object case marking of the corresponding transitive verb. This may in fact motivate an analysis in terms of anticausativization, because even though the verb is unmarked, the argument is not. This would, in other words, count as dependent-marking of the anticausative variant, as opposed to head-marking, which is the usual way of marking anticausatives. With the term *anticausativization* I refer to an alternation involving a reduction in transitivity, and hence valency, either from ditransitive to transitive or from transitive to intransitive.

Not all transitive verbs in Icelandic participate in this alternation, although several predicates from Table 5 do so. Dative ones are: *hvolfa* ‘capsize’, *kasta* ‘throw’, *slá* ‘strike’, *taka* ‘take’ and *hlaða* ‘load’. Accusative ones are: *sjá* ‘see’, *reka* ‘drive’, *brjóta* ‘break’, *bera* ‘carry’, *drepa* ‘kill’, *fylla* ‘fill’, *rífa* ‘tear’, and *taka* ‘take’. And, finally, there is only one genitive verb in Table 5 that participates in the Oblique Ambitransitive Alternation, namely *geta* ‘mention’.

In a recent work on anticausatives in Old Norse-Icelandic, Sandal (2011) documents that change-of-state verbs and motion verbs are most frequently found in this ambitransitive alternation (cf. Haspelmath 1987), but also some psych verbs and a small set of verbs denoting affectedness are also found. The event expressed by the intransitive 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 seems to capture the facts of Modern Icelandic as

well.

It is interesting, however, that not all change-of-state verbs and motion verbs in Icelandic participate in this alternation. That is, the alternation is neither productive nor 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 either Old Norse-Icelandic or in Modern Icelandic. One example from the list in Table 5 is *kasta* which means ‘throw’ in the ordinary transitive construction with a dative object, but ‘feel nauseous’ when used in the Dative Subject Ambitransitive alternant, as in *Honum kastaði fyrir brjósti*.

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. 45). Another verb, *þýsa* ‘urge’, selects for Nom-Acc-Gen when used ditransitively, but only for Acc-Gen in the anticausative function (ex. 46).

- (45) 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’
- (46) 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’
 (Ottósson 2013: xx)

In example (46) the aforementioned lack of semantic transparency between the verbs in the two alternants becomes quite apparent, with *þýsa* meaning ‘urge’ in the ditransitive variant but ‘desire’ in the derived transitive variant. One does, however, not have to ponder the issue long, before one realizes that ‘desire’ is basically the same as ‘feel urge’, which makes the semantic link between the two uses quite transparent. In Modern Icelandic, however, the ditransitive variant has more or less fallen into disuse, further obscuring the historical link, and contributing effectively to the lexicalization of the 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, and Bavarian German:

- (47a) *Sodą prinešė sniego.* Lithuanian
 garden.ACC brought snow.GEN
 ‘The garden was filled with snow.’
- (47b) *Lodku uneslo vniz po tečeniju.* Modern Russian
 boat.ACC drifted.away down on stream
 ‘The boat drifted down the stream.’

- (47c) *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 (47c) 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 (47c) is cognate with a corresponding construction in Icelandic, shown in (48).

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

These are the kind of constructions that Malchukov (2008) calls *transimpersonal* in his work on the origin of non-canonical case marking of subjects.

Compare also the following Latin examples (from Cennamo 2008), where (49a) is transitive with a nominative subject and an accusative object, while in (49b) the subject(-like argument) of the intransitive is in the accusative case. This appears to be the same kind of alternation reported on above for Icelandic, Bavarian German, Lithuanian and Old Russian.

- (49a) *nisi memoria me fallit* Transitive
 if.not memory.NOM me.ACC deceives
 ‘if memory does not deceive me’
- (49b) *quod me non fefellit* 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 Ambitransitives from other Germanic languages, as well as Balto-Slavic, shows that the construction is not specific for Icelandic, as argued by Ottósson (2013), but may mean that the construction is inherited from an earlier stage.

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 *plata* ‘hit’ which selects for an accusative object in the active voice (50a), *hræða* ‘frighten’ which also selects for an accusative object (50b) *hjálpa* ‘help’ which selects for a dative object in the active voice (50c), as well as by verbs like *segja* ‘say’ which may select for two objects in the active voice, an indirect and a direct object (50d). All but the first example contain verbs that are found on the list in Table 5 above. 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.

- (50a) *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.’

- (50b) *Það var hrætt mig allsvakalega en jú hríðarnar voru vondar.*
 it was scared me.ACC horribly but yes labor.pains.the.NOM were bad
 ‘I had been frightened horribly, and yes the labor pains were bad.’
- (50c) *... 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.’
- (50d) *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.’

The felicitousness of transitives and ditransitives in the Impersonal Passive Construction is rather surprising given that Impersonal Passives are a special development of canonical passives, a development specifically targeting 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. How else does one explain that ordinary transitive verbs, which usually occur in the canonical passive, have suddenly started occurring in the Impersonal Passive, which has so far been confined to intransitive verbs? Observe that there is in fact a difference in meaning between instances of transitive verbs occurring in the canonical passive and in the Impersonal Passive:

- (51a) *Ég var hrædd illilega.* Nominative Passive
 I.NOM was scared badly
 ‘I was frightened badly.’
- (51b) *Það var hrætt mig illilega.* Impersonal/Actional Passive
 it was scared me.ACC badly
 ‘I was the victim of a major frightening activity.’

The difference between the two is that (51a) is an ordinary processual passive, while (51b) emphasizes the event to a much greater degree than the canonical passive does, as is evident from the difference in translation between the two. The difference in translation is of course slightly exaggerated, but it still captures the core of the meaning of the Impersonal/Actional Passive, as opposed to the canonical passive.

That the Impersonal Passive has a unit status (in the sense of Langacker 1987) 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*, literally “Patient Form”, and the active which is called *germynd*, literally “Active Form”. The term *verknaðarmynd* ‘Actional Passive’ refers to the higher degree of actionality than in the canonical passive which is processual. As is also evident in the difference in meaning between (51a) and (51b), the emphasis is on

the *event*, to a much larger degree than in the canonical passive (cf. Landén & Molnár 2003, Barðdal & Molnár 2003).

In the canonical passive the object of the transitive is promoted to subject, which distributes the attention evenly between the subject and the event. The Actional Passive is even more “eventive” than the canonical passive, as it highlights the event and its effect on the in-situ object. In that sense, one could view the Actional Passive as a focus construction where the action or the event is focused (in the sense of “focus of attention”); there is no nominative subject in the Actional Passive to share the focus with the event, as in the canonical passive.

Observe that the Impersonal Passive construction in Icelandic is highly actional even when instantiated by intransitive predicates:

(52a) *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.**

there was much fallen

‘Fortunately, Patricia’s skating abilities were similar to mine, so the two of us were together on the easiest children’s slope :-) and even there **a lot of falling took place.**’

(52b) *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 (52a) 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 (52b), the event is construed as if falling and having fun is one of the intensions with going skating at this particular ramp.

There is a lively debate in the literature on the status of this construction as a passive construction or an active (impersonal) 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 (53), 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:

(53) *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 (54), and in English (55); the latter, by the way, does not have an Impersonal Passive Construction, neither with intransitive predicates nor with transitive ones:

- (54a) ... *að aukamáltíðirnar séu aldrei borðaðar **standandi**.*
 that extra.meals.the.NOM are.SUBJ never eaten standing
 ‘... that the extra meals are never eaten standing up.’
- (54b) *Skálin var drukkin, **standandi**. Ari Arason Orri stóð fyrstur upp, brosandi*
 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.’
- (55a) *The weather was lovely and lunch was eaten **sitting on the grass near the park**.*
- (55b) *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 (54) where a participial adjunct is bound and the grammaticality of the comparable English examples in (55), either the examples of the Actional Passive in (53) and similar ones must be analyzed as passives, on Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir’s own account, or examples of canonical passives in Icelandic in (54) and in English in (55) must be analyzed as actives.

This discussion of the extension of the Impersonal Passive to more transitive predicates resulting in the alleged “emergence” of the Actional Passive in Icelandic 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 (cf. Section 3.3). However, indirect objects may also be marked in the accusative case and so may syntactic subjects (cf. Barðdal 2001c: Ch 3, 2011b). 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) partly motion verbs like *kasta* ‘throw’ and *slaka* ‘slacken’, and c) partly predicates denoting human interaction (cf. Section 3.1). These are the overall tendencies that have emerged on argument coding 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 (cf. Barðdal 2011b). The Accusative and the Dative Subject Constructions divide across two types of events, namely experience-based and happenstance events (Section 3.2). It is therefore a gross

oversimplification to state that oblique subjects in Icelandic are confined to experiencers or to experiencers and beneficiaries, as is frequently done in the literature (see the references cited in Barðdal 2004). There is also a semantic overlap between the Accusative and the Dative Subject Construction which motivates the well-known tendency called Dative Substitution (cf. Section 4.1). 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 experiencers. Either Icelandic, and perhaps Indo-European (cf. the list of dative subject predicates across five different Indo-European branches in Barðdal et al. 2012), 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 on non-canonical case marking of subjects across non-related languages.

Another issue worthy of recognition is the classification into 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. Van Valin 2005, Donohue 2008, Barðdal & Eythórsson 2012), such as the three rightmost columns in Table 3 in Section 3 above, reproduced below for the sake of convenience (in a down played color). The Dixonian trichotomy also sets aside the internal variation found between subtypes of the Nominative Subject Construction in the leftmost column (also down played in color).

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

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 (cf. Barðdal & Eythórsson 2012). 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 (for a comparative discussion, see Haspelmath 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 either default case assignment or on the basis of the most frequent case assignment, although as far as I am aware Dixon's alignment typology was not based on 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.

Turning to the issue of coded alternations (Section 5), 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, anticausative marker, inchoative marker or resultative marker. These functions are obtained through lexical polysemy and different structural options. Reflexives and reciprocals, in contrast, are morphologically marked, sharing the morphological marker *-st* with middles and deponent verbs. These functions may also be found with an unmarked verb occurring with a reflexive object instead.

The Passive is coded differently from the Mediopassive (see Section 5), namely as a periphrastic structure, while the Mediopassive is marked with an *-st* suffix on the verb. 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 verbs selecting for reflexive objects and prepositional objects, but also to ordinary transitive and ditransitive predicates (see Section 6), resulting in what I have called here the Actional Passive (cf. Barðdal & Molnár 2003).

Icelandic also has two ways of rendering anticausativization/ambitransitivity; first with the use of reflexive morphology, and second with two types of labile verbs (see Section 6). The first category of labile verbs comes with a nominative subject and an intransitive verb, while the subject case marking of the latter category 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. It is, in other words, a matter of dependent-marked anticausativization and not head-marked anticausativization. This second type of anticausativization, here labeled Oblique Ambitransitive, I believe, is quite rare cross-linguistically.

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