

Agreement and the Icelandic Passive: A Smuggling Account

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1 Background and Overview of the Data

Since Zaenan, Maling, Thráinsson 1985, the Icelandic passive has been of interest to syntacticians. In particular, the Icelandic passive illustrates case-preservation with datives. An object that is accusative in the active surfaces as a nominative subject in the passive. However, an object that is dative in the active, surfaces as a dative subject in the passive. Icelandic also has active sentences with dative subjects, and if there is an object, it bears nominative. This paper explores two dichotomies in agreement in dative-nominative constructions. First, in actives, verbs obligatorily agree with nominative subjects, but optionally agree with nominative objects. (Icelandic verbs do not agree with datives.) The default form of the verb is allowed in (1)b, but not allowed in (1)a.

- (1) a. Við lásu/ *las bókina.
we.nom read.1pl/ dft book.the.acc
'We read the book.' (Sigurðsson 1996, ex 14)
- b. Einum málfraðingi líkuðu/ líkaði þessar hugmyndir.
one linguist.dat liked.3pl/ dft these ideas.nom.pl
'One linguist liked these ideas.' (Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008, ex 12)

Constructions such as (1)b have notably been discussed in Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008. This paper contributes new data. A survey of sixty-one native speakers reveals another pattern.¹ In passives, the auxiliary and the participle obligatorily agree with the nominative object, as shown in (2)a. Icelandic also has a class of verbs that end in *-s* that have a variety of interpretations. These include middle, reflexive, reciprocal, inchoative, and arguably passive, though this is debated. (See Thráinsson 2007 and Wood 2012a/b for discussion.) Crucially, in (2)b, the verb optionally agrees with the nominative object.

- (2) a. Öllum börnum voru/ *var gefnar kökur.
all children.the.dat.pl was.3pl/ dft given.nom.fem.pl cakes.nom.fem.pl
'All children were given cakes.'
- b. Einhverjum útlendingum buðust/ bauðst betri kjör.
some foreigners.dat.pl (were) offered.3pl/ dft better conditions.nom.pl
'Some foreigners were offered better conditions.'

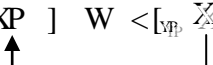
Passives, therefore, pattern like actives with nominative subjects, while *-s* constructions pattern like actives with nominative objects. I argue that this contrast arises because the dative intervenes between T and the nominative in (1)/(2)b, but does not intervene in (1)/(2)a. T optionally probes past the intervener in (1)/(2)b, via Sequential Agree (Nomura 2005). This proposal builds on Preminger 2010/2011, which argues that ϕ -agreement may fail under certain structural conditions, and still lead to a grammatical outcome. By contrast, I argue that T necessarily probes the nominative in the (a) constructions. I apply Collins' (2005) smuggling analysis of passives in English to Icelandic. In (2)a, the phrase containing the participle and the nominative moves past the dative, making the nominative the closest DP to T, just as the nominative is the closest DP to T in (1)a. Additionally, I argue that agreement with the participle in (2)b comes about via covaluation, an operation proposed in Bhatt (2005). I propose that T values the case feature on both the nominative and the participle and that the nominative values the ϕ -features on both T and the participle.

¹ The survey was conducted in Fall 2008 at the University of Iceland. The survey was a forced choice task in which speakers were asked to select either the agreeing or the default form of the verb as the form they would be most likely to use in casual conversation. Examples are based on those appearing throughout Thráinsson (2007) and were developed in consultation with Jóhannes Gísli Jónsson. Agreement preferences in dative-nominative actives were also tested.

2 Theoretical Assumptions

2.1 Smuggling – Collins 2005

On Collins' proposal, an agent DP is merged in Spec, ν P in both actives and passives. This is contra the standard account of passives, in which the agent is merged in an adjunct *by*-phrase. Collins' primary argument against the standard account is that generating the agent in different syntactic positions violates the Uniformity of Theta-Assignment Hypothesis (UTAH), in which there is a one-to-one mapping between theta role and structural position. (Baker 1988/ 1997) Collins proposes that *by* heads VoiceP, which is merged higher than ν P. The participle and the direct object are merged inside PartP, and crucially, PartP moves to Spec, VoiceP via Smuggling. As shown in (3), this movement allows a head to probe the moved phrase without encountering an intervention effect.

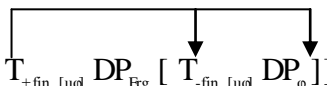
- (3) Smuggling: Z [_{ν P} XP] W <[_{VoiceP} ZP] > YP smuggles XP past W; Z probes XP
 (Collins 2005: 97)

2.2 Covaluation – Bhatt 2005

Verbs in Hindi-Urdu agree with the highest DP within the clause that is morphologically unmarked for case. Ergative subjects appear in clauses with perfective aspect, and ergative DPs bear the suffix *-ne*. Since ergatives bear an overt case marker, verbs do not agree with them. In constructions with infinitival complements, there is optional long-distance agreement. The matrix verb may agree with the embedded object or the verb may appear in the default masculine form. Interestingly, when the matrix verb agrees, the infinitive agrees with the embedded object as well, as shown in (4)a. Likewise, when the matrix verb appears in the default form, so does the infinitive, as shown in (4)b.

- (4) a. LDA, matrix verb and infinitive agree with embedded object²
 Shahrukh-ne [tehnii kaat -nii] chaah-ii thii.
 Shahrukh-erg branch.fem cut-inf.fem. want-pfv.fem. be.past.fem.sg
 'Shahrukh had wanted to cut the branch.'
 b. No LDA, default agreement on matrix verb and infinitive
 Shahrukh-ne [tehnii kaat-naa] chaah-aa thaa.
 Shahrukh-erg branch.fem cut-inf.masc. want-pfv.masc.sg. be.past.masc.sg.
 'Shahrukh wanted to cut a/ the branch.' (Bhatt 2005, ex 6)

Bhatt proposes that when the matrix (finite) T probes the embedded object in (4)a, the object covaluates the ϕ -features on the nonfinite T. That is, the embedded object values the ϕ -features on both the matrix T and the nonfinite T, as shown in (5). In (4)b, the matrix T does not probe the embedded object, so the object cannot covaluate the ϕ -features on nonfinite T.

- (5)  [T_{+fin, [uq]} DP_{Erg} [T_{-fin, [uq]} DP _{ϕ}]] *covaluation*

2.3 Sequential Agree – Nomura 2005

In his analysis of nominative objects in Icelandic and Japanese, Nomura proposes Sequential Agree, defined in (6). Sequential Agree crucially differs from Multiple Agree (Hiraiwa 2001/ 2005) in that probing of numerous goals happens iteratively, whereas goals are probed simultaneously via Multiple Agree.

- (6) Sequential AGREE
 a. Primary AGREE must take place if there is an active Goal.
 b. Subsequent AGREE (if any) takes places if there is an unvalued Goal.
 c. AGREE respects Locality.³ (Nomura 2005:27)

² Bhatt proposes that the construction in (4)a is restructuring. Therefore, the matrix verb and the embedded object are in the same clause.

³ Nomura also proposes that as long as the probing head is highest in the derivation, Agree is not counter-cyclic.

2.4 The ‘Failure’ of Agree – Preminger 2010/ 2011

In possessor dative constructions in Hebrew, the possessed DP may appear pre or post-verbally. Agreement is obligatory with the pre-verbal DP, as shown in (7). Lack of agreement is acceptable with the post-verbal DP, shown in (8). When there is no dative, agreement is obligatory with the post-verbal subject, shown in (9).

(7) SV – Agreement Obligatory

- | | |
|--|---|
| a. ha-cincenet nafl-a le-Dani
the-jar.fem fell-3sg.fem dat-Dani
‘Dani’s jar fell.’ | b. * ha-cincenet nafal le-Dani
the-jar.fem fell-3sg.masc dat-Dani
‘Dani’s jar fell.’ (Preminger 2010, EX 1) |
|--|---|

(8) VS with dative– Lack of Agreement tolerated

- | | |
|--|---|
| a. nafl-a le-Dani ha-cincenet
fell-3sg.fem dat-Dani the-jar.fem
‘Dani’s jar fell.’ | b. ? nafal le-Dani ha-cincenet
fell-3sg.masc dat-Dani the-jar.fem
‘Dani’s jar fell.’ (Preminger 2010, EX 2) |
|--|---|

(9) VS without dative– Agreement Obligatory

- | | |
|--|--|
| a. nafl-a ha-cincenet
fell-3sg.fem the-jar.fem
‘The jar fell.’ | b. *nafal ha-cincenet
fell.3sg.masc the-jar.fem
‘The jar fell.’ (Preminger 2010, EX 7) |
|--|--|

Preminger argues that ϕ -agreement is not actually optional; otherwise we would expect optional agreement in (9). Rather, ϕ -agreement must be attempted, but the structure may prevent agreement from succeeding.

3 Analysis

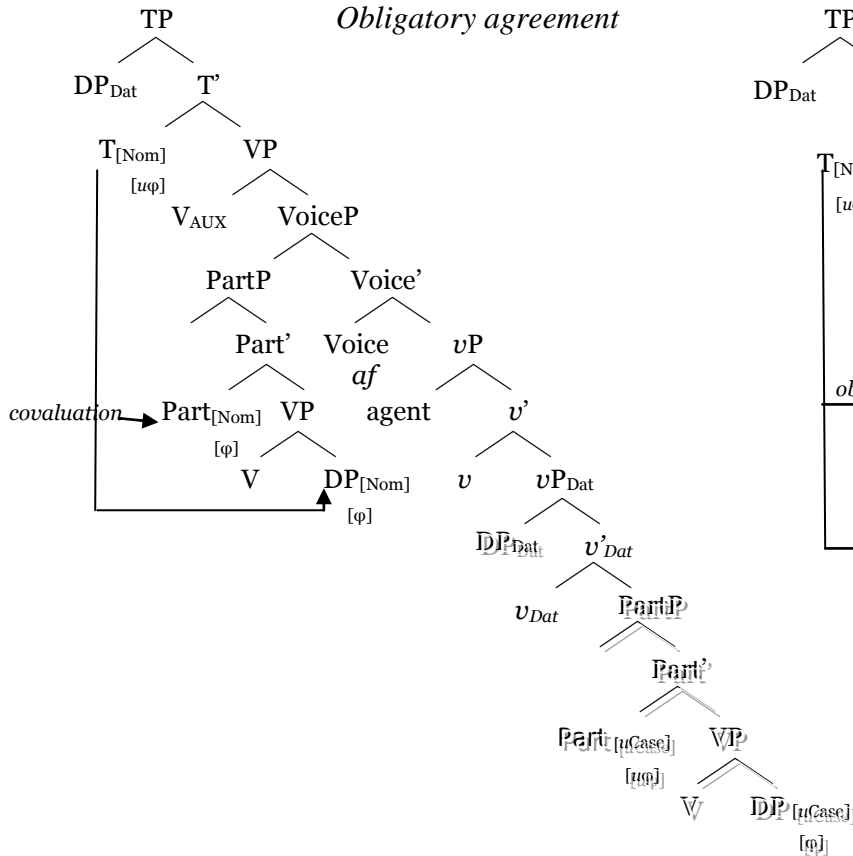
The derivation for (2)a is shown in (10)a. The semantic indirect object is merged in Spec, ν P_{Dat}, where it receives dative case. T is merged with valued nominative and unvalued ϕ the direct object is merged with unvalued case and valued ϕ and the participle is merged with unvalued case and unvalued ϕ . Crucially, I follow Collins’ proposal that PartP, which contains the participle and the direct object, is licensed by moving to Spec,VoiceP. When VoiceP is merged, PartP smuggles past the dative. The consequence for Icelandic passives is that the dative does not intervene between T and the direct object. Therefore, T necessarily probes the direct object. When T probes the object to value nominative, T covalues nominative on the participle. The nominative, in turn, values ϕ -features on T and covalues ϕ -features on the participle. The auxiliary and the participle, therefore, obligatorily agree with the nominative. (*Af* ‘by’ heads VoiceP if it is in the numeration. If not, Voice and Spec, ν P are spelled out as null.) In (1)a, there is also no intervener between T and the nominative, and there is obligatory agreement.

The derivation for (2)b is shown in (10)b. Following Wood 2012a/b, *-s* occupies Spec,VoiceP.⁴ Since an agent cannot be expressed in *-s* constructions, there is no ν P. There is also no participle, and consequently, no PartP. The crucial difference between (10)a and (10)b is that the dative intervenes between T and the nominative in (10)b. I argue that Sequential Agree is an optional operation, and therefore, T only optionally probes the nominative. In (10)b, T first probes the dative, but datives cannot value ϕ -features on T, since Icelandic verbs do not agree with datives. T, then, optionally probes the nominative, resulting in agreement. When T probes only the dative, the verb appears in the default.⁵ Optional Sequential Agree also accounts for (1)b, in which agreement is optional.

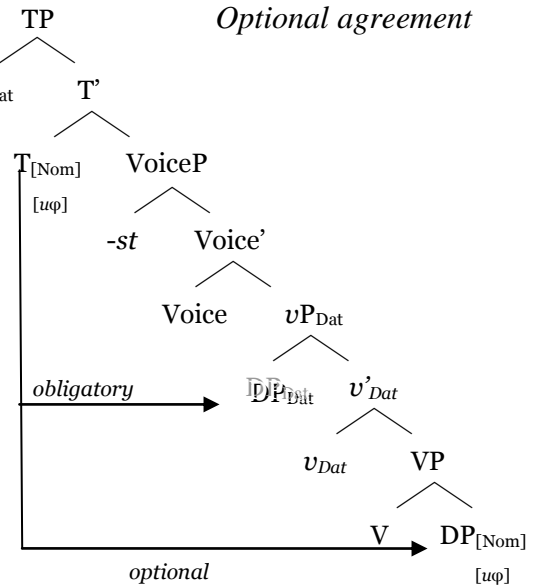
⁴ Wood illustrates that *-s* distributes like a clitic.

⁵ See also Ussery 2011/ 2012 and Wood 2012a for similar analyses.

(10) a. No intervener: Smuggling+Covaluation
Obligatory agreement



b. Dative intervener: Optional Sequential Agree
Optional agreement



4 Conclusion

In Icelandic dative-nominative constructions, agreement with the nominative is either obligatory or optional. When the dative does not intervene between T and the nominative, agreement is obligatory. However, when the dative does intervene, agreement is optional. This pattern lends support to the idea that agreement “failures” are tolerated under the right structural conditions.

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