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## The Icelandic verb phrase: a description

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# The Icelandic verb phrase: a description

## 1 The order of elements in the verb phrase

All syntactic constituents have a core-word or a HEAD. Thus, an adjective is the head of an adjective phrase, AP, an adverb is the head of the adverbial phrase, AdvP, a noun or a pronoun is the head of a noun phrase, NP, and a *verb* is the head of the *verb phrase*, VP. Other parts of syntactic constituents are either DETERMINERS, MODIFIERS or COMPLEMENTS of the head. Thus, in the VP *read the book*, the verb *read* is the head of the VP, and the object *the book* is the head's complement (see also on heads, complements, determiners and modifiers in chapter 6, on noun phrases).

The Icelandic verb phrase is basically verb initial, beginning with either an auxiliary or a main verb. However, the tensed verb normally moves out of the verb phrase, to the Tense position in subordinate clauses and all the way to the C-position in main clauses. This means that the 'remaining' verb phrase, 'left behind' or 'stranded by' the verb movement, does not contain a tensed verb, whereas it often contains non-tensed verbs. In case the clause contains only one (tensed) verb, no verb is within the verb phrase. The tensed verb is underlined in the following examples; the verb phrase is within brackets, the slot showing that the tensed verb has moved from the verb phrase's initial position (to Tense in (1a), to C in (1b)):

- (1) a. ... að hann hefur líklega ekki [\_\_ tekið lestina].  
... that he has probably not taken train.the  
b. Þá hefur hann líklega ekki [\_\_ tekið lestina].  
then has he probably not taken train.the

The basic order of elements in the Icelandic verb phrase is:

- (2) Main verb – Indirect object – Direct object – Bound adverbials / predicative complements

This is illustrated in (3) and (4):

- (3) a. Ég ætla að gefa henni penna í jólagjöf.  
I intend to give her.DAT pen.ACC in Christmas-present  
'I will give her pens as a Christmas present.'  
b. Hann hefur svipt hana lífsgleðinni.  
he has deprived her.ACC life-joy.the.DAT  
'He has deprived her of her happiness.'  
c. Ég er búinn að setja fiskinn á pönnuna.  
I am done to put fish.the.ACC on pan.the  
'I have (already) put the fish into the pan.'  
d. Hún hefur líklega verið góður lækni.  
she has probably been good doctor  
'She was probably a good doctor.'  
e. Hún mun hafa verið í grænum jakka.  
she shall have been in green jacketed  
'She was in a green jacket, they say.'

- f. Henni voru gefnir pennar af forsetanum.  
 her.DAT were.3PL given.PL pens.NOM by president.the  
 ‘She was given a pen by the president.’

(4)

| <i>X</i>                              | <i>Main verb</i>   | <i>Indirect object</i> | <i>Direct object</i>             | <i>Bound adverbials / Predicative complements</i> |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Ég ætla að<br>I intend to             | gefa<br>give       | henni<br>her.DAT       | penna<br>pen.ACC                 | í jólagjöf<br>for christmas-present               |
| Hann hefur<br>he has                  | svift<br>deprived  | hana<br>her.ACC        | lífsgleðinni<br>life-joy.the.DAT |   |
| Ég er búinn að<br>I am done to        | setja<br>put       |                        | fiskinn<br>fish.the.ACC          | á pönnuna<br>on pan.the                           |
| Hún hefur líklega<br>she has probably | verið<br>been      |                        |                                  | góður læknir<br>(a)good doctor                    |
| Hún mun hafa<br>she shall have        | verið<br>been      |                        |                                  | í grænum jakka<br>in green jacket                 |
| Henni voru<br>her.DAT were.3PL        | gefnir<br>given.PL | pennar<br>pens.NOM     |                                  | af forsetanum<br>by president.the                 |

MANNER ADVERBIALS have their canonical position next after the direct object (when they are not clause-initial):

- (5) a. Ég setti bókina **varlega** á borðið.  
 I put book.the cautiously on table.the  
 ‘I put the book cautiously on the table.’  
 b. ?\*Ég setti **varlega** bókina á borðið.  
 c. ??Ég setti bókina á borðið **varlega**.

STAGE-SETTING ADVERBIALS of space and time, on the other hand, have their canonical position clause-finally, after the VP (when they are not clause-initial). Normally, space precedes time:

- (6) Við vildum helst hafa sagt þér þetta [í **London**] [um **helgina**].  
 we would most have told you this in London over weekend.the  
 ‘We would preferably have liked to tell you this in London over the weekend.’

OBJECTS sometimes shift around a sentence adverbial and thereby out of the minimal VP by so-called OBJECT SHIFT, see further section ... and section 5.4 below. Also, objects may either precede or follow PARTICLES, as will be discussed in 5.3.

## 2 Reflexive Verbs

TRANSITIVITY divides verbs into several major classes:

- Intransitive verbs take no object
- Transitive (or monotransitive) verbs take one object
- Optionally transitive verbs may or may not take an object

- Ditransitive verbs (or double object verbs) may take two objects

This is illustrated below with English examples:

- |     |    |                           |                       |
|-----|----|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| (1) | a. | She died. / *She died it. | intransitive          |
|     | b. | She took it. / *She took. | transitive            |
|     | c. | She sang. / She sang it.  | optionally transitive |
|     | d. | She gave him the book.    | ditransitive          |

Many transitive verbs may take a reflexive regular object: *She respects herself*, etc. This is common in all Germanic languages. In addition, however, all Germanic languages except English have a class of REFLEXIVE VERBS, where the verb and the reflexive pronoun have developed a special meaning together, usually corresponding to the meaning of a single verb in English:

- German: *sich hüten* (self guard = 'take care'), *sich sehnen* (self long = 'long for')
- Swedish: *ångra sig* (regret self = 'regret'), *gräma sig* (fret self = 'fret')

In Icelandic, *-st*-verbs, to be discussed in chapter 9, often correspond to reflexive verbs in the Mainland Scandinavian languages:

- |     |    |  |           |
|-----|----|--|-----------|
| (2) | a. | Dörren öppnade <b>sig</b> långsamt.<br>the door opened SELF slowly<br>'The door opened slowly.'                            | Swedish   |
|     | b. | Dyrnar opnuðust hægt. / *Dyrnar opnuðu <b>sig</b> hægt.<br>the door opened- <i>ST</i> slowly / the door opened SELF slowly | Icelandic |

However, Icelandic also has many reflexive verbs:

- |     |    |  |
|-----|----|--|
| (3) | a. | Hann áttaði <b>sig</b> á þessu.<br>he orientated SELF.ACC on this<br>'He understood this/figured this out.'            |
|     | b. | Hann jafnaði <b>sig</b> .<br>he levelled SELF.ACC<br>'He recovered.'   |
|     | c. | Hann flýtti <b>sér</b> heim.<br>he hurried SELF.DAT home<br>'He hurried home.'   |
|     | d. | Hann gætti <b>sín</b> ekki á hættunni.<br>he heeded SELF.GEN not on danger.the<br>'He didn't look out for the danger.' |

There are some instances where a reflexive verbs (e.g. *klæða sig* 'get dressed') can be replaced by an *-st*-verb (e.g. *klæðast* 'get dressed') but generally, this is not the case.

Some reflexive verbs cannot take a non-reflexive object (*átta sig* 'figure out' vs. \**átta Pétur*), and those that can take a non-reflexive object have a different meaning when they do (*jafna sig* 'recover' vs. *jafna deilu* 'settle a dispute'). – Ordinary transitive verbs can of course take a reflexive object without any radical shift in meaning: *raka sig* 'shave oneself' vs. *raka*

*Jón* ‘shave John’ (whereas e.g. *skera sig* ‘cut oneself’ is a borderline case, often with a non-agentive or a non-volitional reading).

With respect to word order, the reflexive of a reflexive verb behaves like an ordinary reflexive object, always preceding verb particles: *Hann sleit sér út* ‘he wore himself out’, *Hún setti sig inn í málið* ‘she acquainted herself with the issue’ (lit. ‘put herself into the issue’).

### 3 Particle verbs and verb particles

Like other Germanic languages, Icelandic has numerous VERB PARTICLES, that is to say, particles that make up a semantic unit with a verb. Such verbs are usually referred to as PARTICLE VERBS. They function semantically like a single predicate, denoting a single event (where ‘event’ refers to states as well as processes). Usually, the meaning of particle verbs differs quite markedly or even radically from the meaning of the basic verb alone:

- (1) a. *taka* ‘take’
- b. *taka fram* (take forth) ‘state, mention (explicitly)’
- c. *taka til* (take towards) ‘clean up’
- d. *taka upp* (take up) ‘record’
- e. *taka út* (take out) ‘suffer; withdraw cash’
- f. *taka við* (take with) ‘receive; take over’

In fact, particle verbs often have two or more different meanings. Also, REFLEXIVE PARTICLE VERBS have meanings of their own that may differ markedly from the meaning of the particle verb without the reflexive:

- (2) a. *taka til* ‘clean up’ vs. *taka sig til* ‘get oneself ready’
- b. *taka upp* ‘record’ vs. *taka sig upp* ‘move (to live somewhere else)’
- c. *taka út* ‘suffer; withdraw cash’ vs. *taka sig vel út* ‘look good’
- d. *taka við* ‘receive; take over’ vs. *taka við sér* ‘respond’

Most simple adverbs that denote direction or MOVEMENT TOWARD a place may function as verb particles (*draga* = ‘pull’, *fara* = ‘go, leave’, *færa* = ‘move’, *setja* = ‘put, place’):

- (3) a. *aftur* ‘back’: *fara aftur* ‘get worse’, *taka aftur* ‘take back (ones word)’
- b. *fram* ‘forth’: *fara fram* ‘make progress’, *draga fram* ‘highlight’, *setja fram* ‘state’
- c. *inn* ‘in(to)’: *færa inn* ‘enter, book’, *setja inn* ‘put in prison’
- d. *út* ‘out’: *fara út* ‘go out’, *færa út* ‘carry out’, *taka út* ‘suffer; withdraw cash’
- e. *niður* ‘down’: *setja niður* ‘lower (in prestige)’, *taka niður* ‘write down’
- f. *upp* ‘up’: *færa upp* ‘stage (a play)’, *taka upp* ‘record; pick up’

Related adverbs that denote LOCATION (*inni* ‘inside’, *úti* ‘outside’, etc.) or direction or MOVEMENT FROM a place (*innan* ‘from within’, *utan* ‘from outside of’, etc.) may also function as particles, albeit not as frequently. In addition, many *prepositions* can function as particles:

- (4) a. *Við tókum á.*  
we took on  
‘We used our strength.’

- b. Hún sat **hjá**.  
she sat by  
'She did not participate.'
- c. Hann fór **úr**.  
he went from/out of  
'He undressed.'
- d. Þeir lögðu **af**.  
they layed off  
'They lost weight.'

Sometimes, also, particles are combinations of an adverb and a preposition, as in *líða út af* 'faint' (lit. 'glide out off'), *setja út á* 'make a negative remark' (lit. 'put out on'), *skella upp úr* 'burst out in laughter' (lit. 'slam up from').

Many particles are evidently 'gapped' adverbial or preposition phrases:

- (4) a. Hún skellti tólinu **á** (símann).  
she slammed receiver.the on (telephone.the)  
'She hung up (agressively).'
- b. Hún tók peningana **út** (úr bankanum).  
she took money.the out (of bank.the)  
'She withdrew the cash.'

Many particle verbs take an object, as in (5). The object, however, always gets its case from the verb, never from the particle, not even from prepositional particles:

- (5) a. Hún tók frá nokkra miða.  
she took from several tickets.ACC  
'She reserved several tickets.'
- b. Hún færði til nokkra stóla.  
she moved to several chairs.ACC  
'She moved several chairs (around).'

Both *taka* and *færa* usually take an accusative object (e.g. *taka nokkra miða* 'take several tickets', *færa nokkra stóla* 'move several chairs'), whereas the prepositions *frá* 'from' and *til* 'to, towards' take datives and genitives, respectively (e.g. *nokkrum miðum*.DAT, *nokkurra stóla*.GEN).

The order of particle verbs, particles and complements is either verb-particle object, **Prt-O**, as in (5) above, or verb-object-particle, **O-Prt**, as in (6):

- (6) a. Hún hafði tekið **inn nokkrar pillur**.                      Prt-O  
she had taken in some pills
- b. Hún hafði tekið nokkrar pillur **inn**.                      O-Prt

Usually, the order O-Prt, with the object intervening between the verb and its particle, requires a SPECIFIC READING of the object. As opposed to quantified NPs, bare indefinite NPs cannot usually have a specific reading and are thus rather awkward in the pre-particle position:

- (7) a. Hún hafði tekið **inn** pillur. Prt-O  
 b. ??Hún hafði tekið pillur **inn**. O-Prt

Conversely, definite NPs tend to have a specific reading rather than an unspecific one and hence they normally precede particles:

- (8) a. ?Hún hafði slegið **niður** strákana. Prt-O  
 she had knocked down boys.the  
 b. Hún hafði slegið strákana **niður**. O-Prt  
 she had knocked boys.the down

Pronouns (even stressed ones), usually have to precede the particle:

- (9) a. \*Hún hafði slegið **niður** þá. Prt-O  
 she had knocked down them  
 b. Hún hafði slegið þá **niður** O-Prt

In contrast with particles, prepositions always precede and case-mark their objects (except perhaps in poetry, with forced riming):

- (10) a. Hún talaði **til** nokkurra kvenna. Prep-O  
 she talked to several women.GEN  
 'She spoke to several women.'  
 b. \*Hún talaði nokkurra kvenna **til**. \*O-Prep
- (11) a. Hún talaði **til** nokkrar konur. Prt-O  
 she talked to several women.ACC  
 'She persuaded several women.'  
 b. Hún talaði nokkrar konur **til**. O-Prt  
 'She persuaded several women.'

There is some tendency that a verb and a preposition form a semantic unit, in a somewhat similar fashion as a verb and a particle. As these examples would seem to suggest, however, it is generally the case that the meaning of a verb and preposition is much more transparent and predictable than the meaning of verb plus a particle.

Icelandic does NOT usually allow the particle to INCORPORATE into the verb so as to form a complex verb of the form **Prt-V**: for instance *taka frá* 'reserve', *slá niður* 'knock down', *kasta út* 'throw out', NOT \**frátaka*, \**niðurslá*, \**útkasta*. Exceptions like *útbúa* 'fix', *útfæra* 'realize, carry out' can be found, though. In contrast, Icelandic has numerous verbs with an incorporated preposition, as e.g. *undirstrika* 'underline', *yfirfara* 'check' (lit, 'overgo'), *aðgæta* 'check', *álíta* 'consider'. That *undir*, *yfir*, *að* and *á* in these examples are really prepositions rather than participles is suggested by the fact that when not incorporated these elements obligatorily precede their complements:

- (12) a. strika **undir** orðin vs. \*strika orðin **undir**  
 line under words.the  
 b. fara **yfir** textann vs. \*fara textann **yfir**  
 go over text.the



Incorporating prepositions into verbs to form nouns in nominalizations is also a very common and characteristic trait of Icelandic and the other Scandinavian languages (Ice. *innkeyrsla*, Sw. *inkörsel*, Da. *inkørsel*, etc., ‘drive’ (lit. in-drive)).

## 4 Objects

### 4.1 Object types and object positions

Transitive verbs (or monotransitive verbs, to be more exact) take one object and potentially also some PP complement (underlined in (1b)):

- (1) a. Pétur keypti **bók**.  
Peter bought book  
b. Pétur keypti **bók** handa Maríu.  
Peter bought book for Mary

Some verbs that are basically monotransitive can take an ‘extra’ FREE BENEFACTIVE (dative) complement:

- (2) Pétur keyti **sér** bók  
Peter bought self.DAT book.ACC

Free benefactives, however, have a rather limited distribution in Icelandic as compared to many or most of the other Germanic languages. In Icelandic, they are largely limited to reflexive pronouns (and ‘reflexive usage’ of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronouns):

- (3) a. Hún lagaði **sér** kaffi.  
she made self.DAT coffee  
b. Ég lagaði **mér** kaffi.  
I made myself.DAT coffee  
c. ?Hún lagaði **mér** kaffi.  
she made me.DAT coffee  
b. ?Ég lagaði **henni** kaffi.  
I made her.DAT coffee

With some predicates, however, free benefactives are perfectly grammatical in Icelandic too:

- (4) a. Hún orti **honum** ljóð.  
she wrote him.DAT poem  
b. Þeir reistu **honum** minnisvarða.  
they erected him.DAT monument

It is interesting that e.g. English *She made me some coffee* is a perfect sentence, whereas Icelandic *Hún lagaði mér kaffi* is questionable. On the face of it, one might expect that the dative case would license free benefactives in Icelandic as compared to e.g. Swedish and



- b. ?Hún les **sumar bækur ekki**  
she reads some books not
  - c. Hún les **bækurnar ekki**.  
she reads books.the not  
'She does not read the books.'
  - d. Hún les **ÞÆR ekki**.  
she reads THEM not
  - e. Hún les **þær ekki**.  
she reads them not
- (10) a. Hún les ekki **bækur**.  
she reads not books  
'She does not read books.'
- b. Hún les ekki **sumar bækur**.  
she reads not some books
  - c. (?)Hún les ekki **bækurnar**.  
she reads not books.the
  - d. ?Hún les ekki **ÞÆR**.  
she reads not THEM
  - e. \*Hún les ekki **þær**.  
she reads not them

However, even a clause like (9a) becomes substantially better with a contrastive stress on the verb (so-called *verum focus*) and an appropriate continuation:

- (11) ?Hún **LES** **bækur** ekki, flettir þeim bara.  
she **READS** books not, browses-through them only

Object Shift takes place in subordinate clauses as well as in main clauses, and it even takes place in certain infinitives, that is, in clausal *að*-infinitives (PRO-infinitives):

- (12) a. Ég veit að hún les **þær** ekki. / \* ... ekki þær.  
I know that she reads them not  
'I know that she does not read them.'
- b. Það væri leiðinlegt að lesa **þær** ekki. / \* ... ekki þær.  
it would-be boring to read them not  
'It would be boring not to read them.'

In this respect, Icelandic differs sharply from other Scandinavian languages (Holmberg 1986). Consider the Swedish facts in (13):

- (13) a. Jag vet att hon inte läser **dem**. / \* ... dem inte läser (etc.).  
I know that she not reads them
- b. Det vore trist att inte läsa **dem**. / \* ... dem inte läsa (etc.).  
it would-be boring to not read them

This generalization behind these facts is often referred to as **HOLMBERG'S GENERALIZATION**. It may be formulated in a somewhat simplified manner as in (14):

(14) Object Shift takes place only if the main verb moves to the left

Icelandic has verb movement or verb raising to the Tense position in both subordinate clauses and PRO-infinitives (section 4.4.1.1), hence it also has Object Shift in these clause types. This is illustrated in (15), where the arrow indicates movement:

(15)

| Initial field | M i d d l e f i e l d |                |              |                       |                | F i n a l f i e l d |               |
|---------------|-----------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------|
|               | <i>C</i>              | <i>Subject</i> | <i>Tense</i> | <i>Shifted object</i> | <i>S. adv.</i> | <i>Verb</i>         | <i>Object</i> |
| ---           | að                    | hún            | les          | þær                   | ekki           | ←                   | ←             |
| ---           | að                    | PRO            | lesa         | þær                   | ekki           | ←                   | ←             |

As mentioned in section 4.3., adverbial and relative clauses sometimes do not apply verb raising to tense. In such clauses, Object Shift is excluded (just as in mainland Scandinavian languages):

- (16) a. ... þegar hún loksins las **þær**. / \* ... þegar hún þær loksins las.  
 ... when she finally read them  
 b. ... sem ekki las **þær**. / \* ... sem þær ekki las.  
 ... who not read them

Also, in case the clause contains an auxiliary, it is the auxiliary and not the main verb that raises to Tense (or all the way to C in main clauses). In such clauses, Object Shift is excluded, in Icelandic as well as in other Scandinavian languages:

- (17) a. Hún hefur ekki lesið **þær**. / \* Hún hefur þær ekki lesið (etc.).  
 she has not read them  
 b. ... að hún hefur ekki lesið **þær**.  
 ... that she has not read them  
 c. ... að hafa ekki lesið **þær**.  
 ... to have not read them

Icelandic allows topicalization or preposing of main verbs to the Initial Field (Main Verb Topicalization) only very reluctantly:

- (18) ?**Hitt** hef ég marga merkilega menn.  
 met have I many noteworthy persons

However, to the extent this is possible, Object Shift must take place:

- (19) a. ?Hitt hef ég **hann** ekki, en ég hef skrifað honum.  
 met have I him not, but I have writtin (to-)him  
 b. \*Hitt hef ég ekki hann, en ég hef skrifað honum.

The reason is, again, that the main verb has moved to the left:

(20)

| Initial field | M i d d l e f i e l d | F i n a l f i e l d |
|---------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
|---------------|-----------------------|---------------------|

|      | <i>C</i> | <i>Subject</i> | <i>Tense</i> | <i>Shifted object</i> | <i>S. adv.</i> | <i>Verb</i> | <i>Object</i> |
|------|----------|----------------|--------------|-----------------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|
| Hitt | hef      | ég             | ←            | hann                  | ekki           | ←           | ←             |

Negative objects (*ekkert* ‘nothing’, *engan* ‘no-one’, and so on) and other negative constituents normally cannot be placed any further to the right than the negation itself:

- (21) a. Hún hefur **engar bækur** lesið. Cf. Hún hefur ekki lesið **neinar bækur**.  
she has no books read she has not read any books  
b. Hún mundi **ekkert** hafa lesið. Cf. Hún mundi ekki hafa lesið **neitt**.  
she would nothing have read she would not have read anything  
c. Hún vill **um ekkert gamalt** lesa. Cf. Hún vill ekki lesa **um neitt gamalt**.  
she wants about nothing old read she wants not read about anything old
- (22) a. \*Hún hefur lesið engar bækur.  
b. \*Hún mundi hafa lesið ekkert.  
c. \*Hún vill lesa um ekkert gamalt.

Some quantified objects can also precede the main verb, albeit with somewhat variable acceptability:

- (23) a. Hún hefur **einhverjar bækur** lesið. / Hún hefur lesið einhverjar bækur.  
she has some books read  
b. ?Hún hefur **margar bækur** lesið. / Hún hefur lesið margar bækur.  
she has many books read

The order [*quantified object – main verb*] is most commonly found in idiomatic expressions (e.g. *Þeir hafa marga hildi háð* ‘They have many a battle fought’). – Even for non-quantified objects, the order [*object – main verb*] is found in certain frozen expressions: *Með lögum skal land byggja* ‘With the law (one) shall land found’, *Með illu skal illt út reka* ‘With evil (one) shall evil out drive’.

#### 4.2 Case-marking of (single) objects

Objects are most commonly THEMES (including patients), BENEFACTIVES or MALEFACTIVES. Accusative is the most common and the unmarked object case and can represent all these central object roles, as illustrated below:

- (1) a. Hann hitti **mig**. ACC THEME  
he met me.ACC  
b. Hann studdi **mig**. ACC BENEFACTIVE  
he supported me.ACC  
c. Hann rændi **mig**. ACC MALEFACTIVE  
he robbed me.ACC

However, both the genitive and the dative are also used as object cases, the dative quite commonly so but the genitive much less frequently. In part, the use of different object cases seems to be irregular, simply decided by the idiosyncratic lexical demands of individual verbs; consider:

- |     |   |   |           |
|-----|---|---|-----------|
| (2) | a | Við fengum <b>mikið fé</b> .<br>we got much money.ACC             | ACC THEME |
|     | b | Við söfnuðum <b>miklu fé</b> .<br>we(N) collected much money.DAT  | DAT THEME |
|     | c | Við öfluðum <b>mikils fjár</b> .<br>we(N) procured much money.GEN | GEN THEME |

To a considerable extent, however, object case is affected or controlled by semantic properties of the predicate, namely, by its *thematic roles* and its *aspectual properties*, or perhaps rather by its *aktionsart properties*, but I am not making a distinction between aspect and aktionsart here. The Icelandic dative as an object case commonly relates to either thematic role or to aspect whereas the Icelandic genitive as object case primarily or exclusively relates to aspect. – Similar phenomena can also be seen in other case languages, at least to an extent: The cases are used, first, to distinguish between different participants in an event (thematic roles) and, second, to more explicitly specify their relation to the event (aspect/aktionsart).

The DATIVE as an object case is commonly taken by both verbs of CONTROL and verbs of MOVEMENT:<sup>1</sup>

SOME DATIVE-TAKING VERBS OF CONTROL:

*aka* ‘drive (e.g. a car)’, *beina* ‘direct’, *fljúga* ‘fly’ (e.g. an aeroplane), *halla* ‘lean, tilt’, *leiðbeina* ‘direct, guide’, *ráða* ‘decide, control’, *ríða* ‘ride (e.g. a horse)’, *róa* ‘row’, *sigla* ‘sail’, *snúa* ‘turn (e.g. a horse or a boat)’, *stjórna* ‘control, govern’, *stýra* ‘steer; direct’

SOME DATIVE-TAKING VERBS OF MOVEMENT:

*aka* ‘give a ride’, *bylta* ‘overturn; revolutionize’, *ausa* ‘scoop, pour’, *dreifa* ‘spread’, *fleygja* ‘throw away’, *fleyta* ‘float’, *hella* ‘pour’, *henda* ‘throw, throw away’, *hverfa* ‘wind, turn’, *hvísla* ‘whisper’, *hvolfa* ‘turn over, capsize’, *kasta* ‘throw’, *lauma* ‘slip’, *maka* ‘smear’, *miðla* ‘communicate, spread’, *moka* ‘shovel’, *nudda* ‘rub, smear’, *raka* ‘rake’, *renna* ‘slide, glide’, *rykkja* ‘pull, pleat’, *skella* ‘slam’, *skutla* ‘throw; give a ride’, *smella* ‘slam, crack’, *sópa* ‘sweep’, *sparka* ‘kick’, *smyrja* ‘smear, spread’, *snúa* ‘turn, turn over’, *tosa* ‘pull, tug’, *yta* ‘push’, *varpa* ‘throw’, *velta* ‘roll, turn’, *umturna* ‘overturn’, *þeyta* ‘fling, throw’, *þrykkja* ‘press’, *þrýsta* ‘press’

Some examples:

- |     |    |   |
|-----|----|---|
| (3) | a. | Hann leiðbeindi <b>okkur</b> .<br>he guided us.DAT                                  |
|     | b. | Þú ræður <b>þessu</b> .<br>you decide this.DAT<br>‘It is up to you to decide this.’ |
| (4) | a. | Hún hvolfdi <b>bátnum</b> .<br>she turned-over boat.the.DAT                         |

<sup>1</sup> In this context, the term ‘control’ is not used in the well-known syntactic, technical sense but only in the purely semantic, non-technical sense ‘verbs that indicate that the subject has control over its object’ (like a driver, for instance, controls a vehicle he is driving).

- b. Hún kastaði **boltanum**.  
she threw ball.the.DAT

The drawing line between these two semantic verb classes is obviously somewhat fuzzy. Crucially, both the dative of control and the dative of movement expresses an ASPECT OF WHOLENESS or completeness. Thus, objects that are *controlled or moved as a whole* tend to be dative, whereas objects that are effected or only affected in an unspecified manner are usually accusative. This is highlighted by pairs of the following sort:

| DATIVE OBJECTS MOVED AS A WHOLE: |                         | ACCUSATIVE EFFECTED/AFFECTED OBJECTS: |                             |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>hlaða steinum</i>             | ‘pile bricks’           | <i>hlaða hús</i>                      | ‘build a house (of bricks)’ |
| <i>moka sandi</i>                | ‘shovel sand’           | <i>moka skurð</i>                     | ‘dig a ditch’               |
| <i>nudda kremi</i>               | ‘rub cream (into/onto)’ | <i>nudda augun</i>                    | ‘rub one’s eyes’            |
| <i>skjóta kúlunni</i>            | ‘shoot the bullet’      | <i>skjóta manninn</i>                 | ‘shoot the man’             |
| <i>skutla spjóti</i>             | ‘throw a spear’         | <i>skutla hvalinn</i>                 | ‘harpoon the whale’         |
| <i>snúa lyklinum</i>             | ‘turn the key’          | <i>snúa fótinn</i>                    | ‘twist ones foot/ankle’     |
| <i>sópa ruslinu</i>              | ‘sweep the garbage’     | <i>sópa gólfíð</i>                    | ‘sweep the floor’           |

This ‘wholeness’ use of the dative is closely related to the (semantic) INSTRUMENTAL, but it is much more general than the Icelandic instrumental dative, which has become periphrastic, although still seen in (rather formal) examples like *stinga einhvern hnífi* ‘stab someone (with a) knife.DAT’. The wholeness or completeness aspect is in a way the opposite to the PARTITIVE aspect, expressed by partitive or genitive case in some case languages, but it is largely limited to movement and control verbs (i.e. Icelandic does not regularly express wholeness or completeness through case). Conversely, also, not all verbs of complete movement take a dative object; some take an accusative object instead, e.g. the basic verbs that mean ‘move’, *flytja*, *færa* (*til*), and *hreyfa*.

Even more closely related to the instrumental is the DATIVE OF EMISSION (bodily, heavenly and so on):

SOME DATIVE-TAKING VERBS OF EMISSIONS: *blása* ‘blow’, *gjósa* ‘erupt, spout’, *gubba*, *æla* ‘vomit’ (e.g. *æla blóði* ‘vomit blood’), *míga*, *pissa* ‘piss’, *rigna* ‘rain’, *skíta* ‘shit’, *skyrpa* ‘spit’, *snjóa*, snow’, *sprauta* ‘squirt, spray’, etc.

Examples:

- (5) a. Hann ældi **blóði**.  
he vomited blood.DAT  
b. Það rignir **gulli**.  
it rains gold.DAT

The dative as an object case is also common for BENEFACTIVES. Thus, the following verbs are among dative taking verbs:

SOME DATIVE-TAKING VERBS OF BENEFIT:  
*bía* ‘lull’, *bjarga*, ‘rescue’, *borga* ‘pay’, *greiða* ‘pay’, *hjálpa* ‘help’, *hjúkra* ‘nurse’, *hlífa* ‘protect, spare’, *hrósa*, *hæla* ‘praise’, *launa* ‘pay, reward’, *liðsinna* ‘aid’, *miskunna*

‘take pity on’, *mæla með* ‘recommend’, *sinna* ‘attend to, serve’, *umbuna* ‘reward’, *vinka* ‘wave’, *þjóna* ‘serve’, *þóknast* ‘please’, *þyrma* ‘spare’

Examples:

- (6) a. Hann borgaði **mér** fyrir bókina.  
he payed me.DAT for book.the  
b. Hann hjálpaði **henni** í prófinu.  
he helpded her.DAT in test.the  
c. Hermaðurinn þyrmdi **okkur**.  
soilier.the spared us.DAT

In addition, FREE BENEFACTIVES are regularly dative: *laga sér kaffi* ‘make oneself.DAT coffee’, *elda sér súpu* ‘cook onself.DAT a soup’, *yrkja henni ljóð* ‘write her.DAT a poem’.

Some further roles or relations tend to be expressed as dative objects. Thus, some verbs of POTENTIAL RECIPROCITY take a dative object:

SOME DATIVE-TAKING VERBS OF POTENTIAL RECIPROCITY:

*andmæla* ‘contradict; protest’, *ansa* ‘answer’, *bindast* ‘get involved with’, *blandast* ‘get mixed with’, *fagna* ‘greet, welcome’, *giftast* ‘marry’, *heilsa* ‘greet’, *misþyrma* ‘torture’, *mótmæla* ‘contradict; protest’, *skrifa* ‘write to’, *svara* ‘answer’, *taka* ‘accept, take’, *taka á móti* ‘receive’, *taka við* ‘receive’, *treysta* ‘trust’, *trúa* ‘believe’, *trúlofast* ‘become engaged’, *þakka* ‘thank somebody’

Examples:

- (7) a. Þeir andmæltu **mér**.  
they contradicted me.DAT  
b. Þeir heilsuðu ekki hvor **öðrum**.  
they greeted not each other.DAT  
c. Hún giftist **honum**.  
she married him.DAT

This is perhaps not surprising, as verbs of benefit also have the inherent possibility of being construed reciprocally (i.e. one can say e.g. *help each other* much as one can say e.g. *answer each other* or *marry each other*). – Also here, the drawing line between the classes is far from clear cut.

As was illustrated above, verbs of movement and ‘control’ commonly make a distinction between accusative affected or effected objects and dative objects moved or controlled as a whole. Similarly, some verbs make a distinction between accusative affected (or effected) objects and dative BENEFACTIVE objects:

| DATIVE BENEFACTIVE OBJECTS: |                   | ACCUSATIVE AFFECTED OBJECTS: |                               |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <i>greiða barninu</i>       | ‘comb the child’  | <i>greiða hárið</i>          | ‘comb the hair’               |
| <i>klóra sér</i>            | ‘scratch oneself’ | <i>klóra hana</i>            | ‘scratch her (leaving marks)’ |
| <i>strjúka henni</i>        | ‘pat her’         | <i>strjúka sig allan</i>     | ‘stroke oneself all over’     |
| <i>þurrka barninu</i>       | ‘dry the child’   | <i>þurrka hárið</i>          | ‘dry the hair’                |
| <i>þvo barninu</i>          | ‘wash the child’  | <i>þvo fangana</i>           | ‘wash the prisoners’          |



Again, however, we are only dealing with a tendency, not a rule; some verbs take an accusative benefactive object: *aðstoða* ‘assist’, *bera* ‘carry’, *lækna* ‘cure’ (compare *hjúkra* ‘nurse’, taking a dative object), *styðja* ‘aid, support’, *styrkja* ‘support, subsidize’, and so on.

It should also be noted that the choice between accusative and dative objects has not been grammaticized, i.e. it is not only ‘promoted’ or ‘encouraged’ by semantic regularities but also blocked by lexical idiosyncrasies. Consider:

- (8) a. *bifa henni* ‘(be able to) move it/her.DAT’ vs. \**hreyfa henni*<sup>2</sup>  
 b. *hreyfa hana* ‘move it/her.ACC’ vs. \**bifa hana*
- (9) a. *fylgja henni* ‘follow, accompany her.DAT’ vs. \**fylgja hana*  
 b. *elta hana* ‘follow, pursue her.ACC’, vs. \**elta henni*

In addition, the aspectual status of complements is normally expressed by prepositions, rather than by the cases as such:

- (10) a. *hugsa um eitthvað* ‘think about something’ vs. *hugsa eitthvað* ‘think something’  
 b. *lesa í bókinni* ‘read in the book’ vs. *lesa bókina* ‘read the book’  
 c. *taka af þessu* ‘take (some) of this’ vs. *taka þetta* ‘take this’

- and so on.

The GENITIVE is most commonly either adnominal or prepositional. However, it is sometimes used as an object case:

#### SOME GENITIVE-TAKING VERBS

*biðja* ‘ask for’, *biða* ‘wait for’, *geta* ‘mention’, *gæta* ‘heed; take care, look after’, *minnast* ‘(be able to) remember’, *krefjast* ‘demand’, *leita* ‘look for, search for’, *óska* ‘wish for’, *sakna* ‘miss’, *spyrja* ‘ask’, *æskja* ‘wish for’, *þarfnast* ‘need’, *afla* ‘procure’, *neyta* ‘consume’, *njóta* ‘enjoy’

Examples:

- (11) a. Ég beið **þín** lengi.  
 I waited you.GEN long  
 ‘I waited long for you.’
- b. Hann gat **hennar** ekki.  
 he mentioned her.GEN not  
 ‘He did not mention her.’
- c. Þeir krefjast **frelsis**.  
 they demand freedom.GEN

As the list would seem to suggest, most genitive objects denote UNAFFECTED THEMES. Such themes are typically expressed as prepositional complements. It is therefore not surprising that many genitive objects alternate with prepositional objects, e.g. *leita einhvers* ‘look (for) something.GEN’, vs. *leita að einhverju* ‘look for something.DAT’, *biðja einhvers* ‘ask (for) something.GEN’ vs. *biðja um eitthvað* ‘ask for something.ACC’.

<sup>2</sup> The dative is possible in the expression *hreyfa máli* ‘mention an issue’.

### 4.3 The Double Object Construction

Ditransitive verbs take two objects (a ‘double object’). This gives rise to the DOUBLE OBJECT CONSTRUCTION, as in (1):

- (1) a. Við gáfum **henni bækurnar**.  
we gave her.DAT books.the.ACC  
b. Við skiluðum **henni bókunum**.  
we gave-back-to her.DAT books.the.DAT

The first of the two objects is traditionally referred to as the INDIRECT OBJECT, whereas the second object is referred to as the DIRECT OBJECT. The logic behind these notions is that the direct object is more closely semantically related to the verb than is the indirect object, in spite of being ‘farther away’ from it. Thus, ‘give books’ can function as a full predicate (as in e.g. *She always gives only books*), whereas ‘give (to) somebody’ cannot, at least not usually. Also, it is often possible to replace the indirect object with a preposition phrase (as in *He sent the books to her* vs. *He sent her the books*), whereas this is not possible for the direct object (e.g. *\*He sent her of the books*).

The most common CASE PATTERN in the double object construction is by far DAT-ACC, that is, a dative indirect object and an accusative direct one. However, several other patterns are found:

- |   |          |  |
|---|----------|--|
| 1 | DAT-ACC: | e.g. <i>gefa</i> ‘give’, <i>senda</i> ‘send’, <i>segja</i> ‘tell’  |
| 2 | DAT-DAT: | e.g. <i>skila</i> ‘return, give back’, <i>lofa</i> ‘promise’   |
| 3 | DAT-GEN: | e.g. <i>óska</i> ‘wish’, <i>varna</i> ‘deny, block’  |
| 4 | ACC-DAT: | e.g. <i>leyna</i> ‘conceal from’, <i>ræna</i> ‘rob’  |
| 5 | ACC-GEN: | e.g. <i>dylja</i> ‘conceal from’, <i>spyrja</i> ‘ask’  |
| 6 | ACC-ACC: | only two verbs: <i>kosta</i> ‘cost’, <i>taka</i> ‘take’<br>(e.g. <i>kosta tíu krónur</i> ‘cost ten crowns’,<br><i>taka tíu mínútur</i> ‘take ten minutes’) |

The number of verbs that fall into the first five classes is approximately as follows (see Jónsson 2000); only the DAT-ACC class is an open, productive class:

- |   |          |     |
|---|----------|-----|
| 1 | DAT-ACC: | 220 |
| 2 | DAT-DAT: | 29  |
| 3 | DAT-GEN: | 28  |
| 4 | ACC-DAT: | 37  |
| 5 | ACC-GEN: | 21  |

These numbers are ‘maximal’, in the sense that they include idiomatic expressions, verbs that are old-fashioned or formal as ditransitives, as well as verbs that require a reflexive indirect object (and the drawing line between these and free benefactives is often quite unclear).

The order of the objects is usually quite strict, although it may be reversed in (at least) the DAT-ACC class, if the direct and indirect objects are ‘out of balance’, such that the indirect object is distinctively ‘heavier’ or longer than the direct one:

- (2) a. Við gáfum það nokkrum fátækum börnum.  
we gave it.ACC several poor kids.DAT  
b. ??Við lofuðum því nokkrum fátækum börnum.  
we promised it.DAT several poor kids.DAT

Authentic examples of reversed order are not easy to find, but the following one is authentic:<sup>3</sup>

- (3) Og svo sýndum við það fólki sem ...  
and then showed we it.ACC people.DAT who  
'And then we showed it to people who ...'

Negated objects in the double object construction precede the main verb, much as negated objects in general:

- (4) a. Við höfum **engum** gefið þessar bækur. / \* ... gefið engum ...  
we have nobody.DAT given these books.ACC  
'We haven't given these books to anybody.'  
b. Við höfum **engar bækur** gefið henni. / \* ...gefið engar bækur ...  
we have no books.ACC given her.DAT  
'We haven't given her any books.'

If both objects are unstressed pronouns, they both shift across a sentence adverb by Object Shift:

- (5) a. Við gáfum **henni það** ekki.  
we gave her it not  
b. \*Við gáfum **henni ekki það**.  
c. \*Við gáfum ekki **henni það**.  
(6) a. Við lofuðum **henni því** ekki.  
we promised her it not  
b. \*Við lofuðum **henni ekki því**.  
c. \*Við lofuðum ekki **henni því**.

If only the indirect object is a pronoun, the direct object preferably stays behind the adverbial:

- (7) a. Við lofuðum **þeim** ekki **bókunum**.  
we promised them not books.the  
b. ?Við lofuðum **þeim bókunum** ekki.

If, on the other hand it is the direct object that is a pronoun, both objects preferably shift:

- (8) a. ?\*Við lofuðum **stúdentunum** ekki **þeim**.  
we promised students.the not them  
b. Við lofuðum **stúdentunum þeim** ekki.

<sup>3</sup> From a conversation with a friend.

In most of the double object construction classes, the direct object cannot be passivized ‘across’ the indirect one:

- (9) Við skiluðum (henni) bókinni.  
we returned her.DAT book.the.DAT
- (10) a. Henni var skilað \_\_\_ bókinni.  
her.DAT was returned book.the.DAT  
‘She was given back the book.’  
b. \*Bókinni var skilað henni \_\_\_\_.  
c. Bókinni var skilað \_\_\_\_.  
‘The book was returned/given back.’

However, in class 1, the DAT-ACC class of verbs like *gefa* ‘give’ and *senda* ‘send’, this restriction does not hold, i.e. the direct object may be passivized across the indirect one.

- (11) Við gáfum henni bókina.  
we gave her.DAT book.the.ACC
- (12) a. Henni var gefin \_\_\_ bókin.  
her.DAT was given book.the.NOM  
‘She was given the book.’  
b. Bókin var gefin henni \_\_\_\_.  
book.the.NOM was given her.DAT

## 5 Predicative complements

A PREDICATIVE COMPLEMENT is a word or a phrase that functions as a predicate with respect to a noun phrase. Traditionally, the notion predicative is restricted to *noun phrases* (NPs) and *adjectival or participial phrases* (APs or PcpPs) that function as predicatives of subjects or objects, as illustrated in (1); the NPs are underlined, the predicatives boldfaced::

- |        |   |               |
|--------|---|---------------|
| (1) a. | <u>She</u> is <b>an excellent linguist</b> .  | subject – NP  |
| b.     | <u>She</u> must have been <b>drunk</b> .      | subject – AP  |
| c.     | They elected <u>him</u> <b>president</b> .    | object – NP   |
| d.     | We saw <u>him</u> <b>killed in his home</b> . | object – PcpP |

However, neither of these traditional restrictions hold, that is:

- Any NP can take a predicative
- Most phrase types can function as a predicative

The following examples illustrate that both indirect objects and prepositional complements can take a predicative:

- (2) a. Við sýndum honum óvirðingu **druknum**.

- we showed him.DAT disrespect.ACC drunk.DAT
- b. Við fórum aldrei til hans **drukkins**.  
we went never to(-see) him.GEN drunk.GEN

Also, various kinds of phrases may function as predicatives, for instance full clauses (3a), infinitives (3b), adverbs (3c) and PPs (4):

- (3) a. Þetta var **þegar ég var stúdent**.  
this was when I was student
- b. Drykkjuskapur er **að gefast upp**.  
drinking is to give up
- c. Hann hefur verið **hér**.  
he has been here
- (4) a. Hann er **með tösku**.  
he is with bag  
'He is carrying a bag.'
- b. Hann er **í jakka**.  
he is in jacket  
'He is wearing a jacket.'
- c. Hann er **á tónleikum**.  
he is on concert  
'He is listening to a concert.'
- d. Hann er **hjá Pétri**.  
he is by Peter  
'He is at Peter's.'

Consider:

- (6) a. Hann er **ljóshærður**.  
he is fair-haired  
'He is blond.'
- b. Hann er **með ljóst hár**.  
he is with fair hair  
'He is blond.'

There is no good reason to count the adjective *ljóshærður* as a predicative and not to count the PP *með ljóst hár* as a predicative. – In passing, notice that Icelandic *vera* + *P* constructions often express semantic relations that are expressed with single verbs in English and other Germanic languages, for instance: *vera á* 'attend'; *vera í* 'wear; attend'; *vera með* 'wear; carry; have'.

Even simple pronouns and numerals can be predicatives:

- (7) a. Það er **ég**.  
it is.1SG I.NOM  
'It is me.'
- b. Þetta hafa sennilega verið **þær**.  
this has.3PL probably been they.NOM

- ‘It has probably been them.’  
 c. Þjófarnir voru þrír.  
 theaves.the.NOM were three.NOM

Conversely, predicatives can be quite complex, as illustrated for predicative APs and NPs in (8):

- (8) a. Hún er mjög dugleg að skrifa um mál sem vekja athygli.  
 she is very good at writing about issues that raise interest  
 b. Hún er mjög duglegur kennari sem tekur starfið alvarlega.  
 she is very successful teacher who takes job.the seriously

A common type of predicatives is introduced by comparative *sem* ‘as’:

- (9) a. Við kynntumst henni sem prestar.  
 we.NOM got-to-know her as preasts.NOM  
 b. Við kynntumst henni sem presti.  
 we got-to-know her.DAT as preast.DAT  
 c. Við kusum hana sem prest.  
 we elected her.ACC as priest.ACC

As seen, predicative NPs agree in *case* with their predicational NP. In addition, predicative adjectives and participles normally show *number* and *gender* agreement:

- (10) a. Konurnar hittu manninn drukkin.  
 women.the.NOM met man.the.ACC drunk.ACC.M.SG  
 ‘The women met the man (when he was) drunk.’  
 b. Konurnar hittu manninn drukknar.  
 women.the.NOM met man.the.ACC drunk.NOM.F.PL  
 ‘The women met the man (when they were) drunk.’

NPs, in contrast, have their own number and gender:

- (11) a. Bítlarnir voru besta hljómsveitin.  
 Beatles.the.NOM.M.PL were best band.the.NOM.F.SG  
 ‘The Beatles were the best band.’  
 b. Hann var mikið skáld.  
 he.NOM was great poet.NOM.N.SG  
 ‘He was a great poet.’  
 c. Hún er góður prestur.  
 she.NOM is good priest.NOM.F.SG  
 ‘She is a good priest.’

Predicative agreement is discussed in more detail in chapter ...

Most predicatives are SUBJECT PREDICATIVES and also PRIMARY PREDICATES. Most such predicatives can be referred to in discourse by neuter singular *það* ‘it, that’:

- (12) a. Hún er prestur og hann er það líka.  
 she is priest and he is that too

- ‘She is a priest and so is he.’
- b. Húsið er gult en **það** er bíllinn ekki.  
house.the is yellow but that is car.the not  
‘The house is yellow, but the car isn’t.’
- c. Hann er með dökkt hár og hún er **það** líka.  
his is with dark hair and she is that too
- d. Hann var hér í morgun en **það** var hún ekki.  
he was here in morning but that was she not  
‘He was here this morning, but she wasn’t.’

Notice that *það* cannot be left out, nor can it be replaced by a regular, gender agreeing pronoun (*læknir* is a masculine noun):

- (13) a. Jón er læknir og María er **það** líka.  
John is doctor and Mary is that too
- b. \*Jón er læknir og María er líka.  
John is doctor and Mary is too
- c. \*Jón er læknir og María er **hann** líka.  
John is doctor and Mary is he too

When an NP is referential, on the other hand, it is referred to by a gender/number agreeing pronoun:

- (14) Læknirinn kom í morgun og **hann**/\*það var með töskuna.  
doctor.the.M came in morning and he was with bag.the  
‘The doctor came this morning and he had his bag.’

Subject predicatives are most commonly complements of some of the following verbs:

- (15) *vera* ‘be’, *verða* ‘will be, become, get’, *gerast* ‘become, get’ (lit. ‘make oneself’),  
*heita* ‘have the name’, *kallast* ‘be called’, *nefnast* ‘be called’
- (16) a. Hún verður bráðum **rík**.  
she will-be soon rich.NOM
- b. Hún gerðist **læknir**.  
she made-self doctor.NOM  
‘She became doctor (by conscious effort).’
- c. Hún varð **læknir**.  
she became doctor.NOM
- d. Hún heitir **María**.  
she has-the-name Mary.NOM  
‘Her name is Mary.’

Subjects can also take predicatives that are SECONDARY PREDICATES; as indicated by the parentheses in (17), secondary predicates are optional in the sense that clauses are grammatical without them:

- (17) a. Hún fór þangað (mjög hamingjusöm).

- she went there (very happy.NOM)
- b. Hún kom hingað (nýbakaður læknir).  
she came here (new-baked doctor.NOM)  
'She came here right after having graduated as a doctor.'
- c. Hún talaði við okkur (sem prestur).  
she talked with us (as priest.MOM)

OBJECT PREDICATIVES are also optional:

- (18) a. Við sáum hana (mjög hamingjusama).  
we saw him (very happy.ACC)
- b. Við hittum hana (nýbakaðan lækni).  
we met her (new-baked doctor.ACC)
- c. Við töluðum við hana (sem prest).  
we talked with her (as priest.ACC)

Much as English *as*-phrases, Icelandic *sem*-phrases differ from most other predicatives in not being able to function as a primary predicate:

- (19) a. \*Hún var sem prestur.<sup>4</sup>  
she was as priest
- b. Hún var dugleg sem prestur.  
she was successful as priest
- c. Við þekktum hana sem prest.  
we knew her as priest

*Sem* introduces only secondary NP predicates, i.e. it cannot introduce for instance AP predicatives:

- (20) \*Við töluðum við hana sem duglega.  
we talked with her as successful.ACC

Objects and their predicatives make up a SMALL CLAUSE (see ...). The predicative agrees in case with the object:

- (21) a. Við skiluðum [bílnum hreinum].  
we returned car.the.DAT clean.DAT
- b. Við höfum aldrei heilsað [honum fullum].  
we hve never greeted him.DAT drunk.DAT
- (22) a. Við skírðum [drenginn Ólaf].  
we named boy.the.ACC Olaf.ACC
- b. Við sögðum [Ólaf veikan].  
we said Olaf.ACC sick.ACC
- c. Við kusum [Ólaf forseta].  
we wlected Olaf.ACC president.ACC
- d. Við töldum [hana góðan prest].

<sup>4</sup> However, this is acceptable in formal style in the sense 'She was like a priest'.



- e. we considered her.ACC good priest.ACC  
 Við létum [hana eina].  
 we let her.ACC alone.ACC

Examples like the ones in (22) have an accusative object and an accusative predicative. In the corresponding passives, both accusatives are ‘replaced’ by nominative forms:

- (23) a. Drengurinn var skírður Ólafur.  
 boy.the.NOM was named Olaf.NOM  
 b. Ólafur var sagður veikur.  
 Olaf.NOM was said (to be) sick.NOM  
 c. Ólafur var kosinn forseti.  
 Olaf.NOM was elected predisent.NOM  
 d. Hún var talin góður prestur.  
 she.NOM was considered good priest.NOM  
 e. Hún var látin ein.  
 she.NOM was let alone.NOM

## 6 Content Adverbials

Adverbials in general split into SENTENCE ADVERBIALS, discussed in section 2.5, and CONTENT ADVERBIALS. Content adverbials, in turn, split into four major classes:

### CONTENT ADVERBIALS:

Adverbs of degree  
 Complementary adverbials  
 Manner adverbials  
 Scene-setting adverbials

In addition, many adverbial relations (of reason, purpose and so on) are expressed by adverbial clauses.

In this section, I will describe the positioning of content adverbial, primarily with respect to verbs and verb phrases, discussing their structure and meaning in chapter 8.

ADVERBS OF DEGREE are never used as independent adverbials at the clause level, but are instead exclusively used as modifiers of:

- A Adjectives, as in (1), and  
 B Other adverbials (mainly sentence and manner adverbials), as in (2):

- (1) a. **Mjög** gáfaður stúdent uppgötvaði þetta.  
 very intelligent student discovered this  
 b. Hann er **ákaflega** gáfaður.  
 he is intensively intelligent

- (2) a. Hann hefur **afar** sennilega lesið bókina.

- he has very probably read book.the
- b. Ég get ekki komið **svona** oft hingað.  
I can not come so often (to-)here

Since adverbs of degree are modifiers, they don't have any favorite clausal position of their own, so to speak. Other adverbials have different canonical positions within the clause.

COMPLEMENTAL ADVERBIALS (which are usually PPs) have their canonical position directly after the main verb or after the main verb and its object or objects (underlined in (3b,c)):

- (3) a. Ég vil tala [við þig] [um þetta].  
I want.to talk with you about this.
- b. Ég sagði henni frá þessu.  
I told her about this
- c. Ég gaf henni bók í jólagjöf.  
I have her book in Christmas-present  
'I gave her a book for Christmas.'

PP complements have a status that is close to that of objects, that is, they are in many ways argumental. This is illustrated by pairs like the following:

| COMPLEMENTAL ADVERBIALS: |                         | OBJECTS:               |                   |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>gá að einhverju</i>   | 'check (for) something' | <i>athuga eitthvað</i> | 'check something' |
| <i>hlusta á eitthvað</i> | 'listen to something'   | <i>heyra eitthvað</i>  | 'hear something'  |
| <i>gera við eitthvað</i> | 'fix (with) something'  | <i>laga eitthvað</i>   | 'mend something'  |
| <i>horfa á eitthvað</i>  | 'look at something'     | <i>sjá eitthvað</i>    | 'see something'   |

MANNER ADVERBIALS have their canonical position after the 'minimal verb phrase', so to speak, that is:

- A Directly after the main verb in case it does not take an object, or  
B Directly after the objects of the main verb

In other words, manner adverbials come *between* the main verb and its adverbial complements, if it has any, whereas they come *after* objects:

- (4) a. Hann vildi tala **varlega** um kvöldið.  
he wanted talk cautiously in evening.the  
'He wanted to talk cautiously in the evening.'
- b. Hann vildi tala **varlega** við okkur um þetta um kvöldið.  
he wanted talk cautiously with us about this in evening.the
- c. Hann vildi segja **varlega** frá þessu um kvöldið.  
he wanted tell cautiously about this in evening.the
- d. Hann vildi segja okkur **varlega** frá þessu um kvöldið.  
he wanted tell us cautiously about this in evening.the
- e. Hann vildi segja okkur þessar fréttir **varlega** um kvöldið.  
he wanted tell us these news cautiously in evening.the

These facts suggest that objects are more intimately related to their verb than are adverbial complements – perhaps because objects get their case from their verb.

When not placed in the Initial Field, SCENE-SETTING ADVERBIALS of time and place are most commonly placed after the main verb *and* its complements (irrespective of whether the complements are objects or adverbial complements):

- (5) a. Hann hafði talað um málið við okkur **í London á laugardaginn**.  
he had talked about matter.the with us in London on Saturday.the  
b. Hann ætlaði að segja okkur þetta **í París á morgun**.  
he wanted to tell us this in Paris to tomorrow

Thus, one can discern an ordering hierarchy between different types of adverbials: Sentence adverbials (SA) normally precede manner adverbials (MA), which normally precede complemental adverbials (CA), which in turn precede scene-setting adverbials (ScA), that is:

- (6) THE MAIN ADVERBIAL ORDERING HIERARCHY:  
Sentence AdvPs > Manner AdvPs > Complemental AdvPs > Scene-setting AdvPs  
or: SA > MA > CA > ScA

This is illustrated in (7):

- (7) Hún ætlaði [**líklega**] að tala [**rækilega**] [**við okkur**] [**næsta dag**].  
she intended [<sub>SA</sub> probably] to talk [<sub>MA</sub> thoroughly] [<sub>CA</sub> with us] [<sub>SCA</sub> next day]

In addition, ADVERBIAL CLAUSES and ADVERBIAL INFINITIVES normally follow all other adverbials (unless they are preposed to the Initial Field, of course):

- (8) a. Hún ætlaði líklega að tala rækilega við okkur næsta dag, **þegar við kæmum**.  
she intended probably to talk thoroughly with us next day, when we would-come  
b. Hún ætlaði líklega að tala rækilega við okkur næsta dag, **af því að við hættum**.  
she intended probably to talk thoroughly with us next day, by it that we quit  
c. Hún ætlaði líklega að tala rækilega við okkur næsta dag **til að upplýsa okkur**.  
she intended probably to talk thoroughly with us next day, for to inform us  
d. Hún ætlaði líklega að tala rækilega við okkur næsta dag **ef við kæmum aftur of seint**.  
she intended probably to talk thoroughly with us next day, if we would-come again too late

I refer to the hierarchy in (6) as ‘main’ adverbial ordering hierarchy, because there is also a more ‘subordinate’ hierarchy within the adverbial classes, most prominently among sentence adverbials. Several factors, such as ‘heaviness’ or informational richness, can interfere with the main adverbial ordering hierarchy, but I shall not detail here.

As discussed in section 2.5, there is a whole middle sphere in the clause, the SENTENCE ADVERBIAL MIDDLE FIELD, where sentence adverbials have their canonical positions in a rather strict order, as illustrated below:

- (9) Hún hefur **nú samt sennilega ekki alveg** meint þetta þarna um kvöldið.  
she has I.say however probably not really meant this there in evening.the

Icelandic differs from e.g. Swedish in not normally allowing any content adverbials in the sentence adverbial middle field, not even when it contains no sentence adverbs:

- (10) a. Hon hade **om kvällen** druckit för mycket. Swedish  
 she had in evening.the drunk too much  
 b. Hon hade druckit för mycket **om kvällen**.  
 she had drunk too much in evening.the
- (11) a. \*Hún hafði **um kvöldið** drukkið of mikið. Icelandic  
 she had in evening.the drunk too much  
 b. Hún hafði drukkið of mikið **um kvöldið**.  
 she had drunk too much in evening.the

Most adverbials can be preposed, such that they occupy the Initial Field. If the adverbial is clausal or infinitival, it is often followed by an extra *þá* ‘then’:

- (12) a. Ef hann kemur ekki núna **þá** fer ég.  
 if he comes not now then leave I  
 ‘If he doesn’t come now, (then) I’m leaving.’  
 b. Til að verða ekki of seinn líka núna **þá** er best að taka leigubíl.  
 for to be not too late also now then is best to take taxi  
 In order not to come too late also now, it is best to take a taxi.

The ‘extra’ *þá* may also be used after some non-clausal adverbials, especially temporal ones

- (13) ?Um kvöldið **þá** fór hann út.  
 in evening.the then went he out  
 ‘He went out in the evening.’

As indicated, this is somewhat marginal. In contrast, the ‘extra’ *þá* is excluded after preposed complemental adverbials:

- (14) Um þetta (\***þá**) tala ég ekki við þig.  
 about this then talk I not with you  
 ‘About this, I am not talking with you.’

Presumably, the extra *þá* in (12) and (13) occupies a position and has a function that is different from the position and function of *þá* in the following examples:

- (15) a. Sennilega **þá** veit hann bara ekkert um þetta.  
 probably then know he just nothing about this  
 ‘He probably just doesn’t know anything about this.’  
 b. Sennilega **þá** bara veit hann ekkert um þetta.

Icelandic is rather special in that even (a small group of) adverbs of degree may be placed in the Initial Field, that is, such adverbs can be dislocated or moved from their modifying constituent, as illustrated below; the slots show the positions from where the

adverbials have moved; notice that clauses of this type tend to have an exclamative rather than a declarative force:

- (16) a. **Mikið** hefur hún gert þetta [ \_\_ vel].  
very has she done this well  
'How well she has done this. / She has done this very well.'
- b. **Svona** getur hann stundum verið [ \_\_ glaður].  
so can he sometimes be happy  
'So happy he can sometimes be.'
- c. **Ákaflega** held ég að þetta sé [ \_\_ skemmtilegt].  
intensively think I that this is pleasant  
'So very pleasant this must be.'

We may refer to this construction as DEGREE ADVERBIAL FRONTING.

In a similar fashion, *hvað* 'what, how', the most common *wh*-word that questions degree 'strands' or leaves behind the word it modifies:

- (17) a. **Hvað** hefur þú komið hingað [ \_\_ oft]?  
how have you come here often  
'How often have you come here?'
- b. **Hvað** heldur þú að hann sé [ \_\_ gamall].  
how think you that he is old  
'How old do you think he is?'

Alternatively, one can use the more formal *hversu* 'how', *hve* 'how', that 'pied pipe' or 'drag along' the word they modify:

- (18) a. [**Hve(rsu)** oft] hefur þú komið hingað [ \_\_ ]?  
how often have you come here  
'How often have you come here?'
- b. [**Hve(rsu)** gamall] heldur þú að hann sé [ \_\_ ].  
how old think you that he is  
'How old do you think he is?'