

Intra-speaker variation in subject case: Icelandic
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Background: Dative Substitution is one of the most researched topics regarding syntactic change in Icelandic (e.g. Svavarsdóttir 1982, Barðdal 2001, Jónsson and Eythórsson 2005, Thráinsson 2012). The change affects verbs with experiencer subjects, the original accusative subject case being substituted by dative (1). Extensive syntactic surveys have been conducted to document the change, the results indicating that intra-speaker variation is widespread (2) and that dative is more likely to occur in the third person singular than in the first person singular. Despite this, no study had been carried out to document the intra-speaker variation. The aim of the study presented in this paper was to fill this gap and shed light on the nature of the variation.

Study: The object of the study is the distribution of accusative/dative intra-speaker variation in Icelandic subject case. The focus of the study is on pronouns as subjects and the variables of the study concern the subject type. The effect of the first two variables, person and number, has partly been attested. In this study these variables are tested in a more extensive way, adding among other things the second person singular and testing different genders in the third person. Additionally, the possible effect of nominative/accusative syncretism is tested. This is based on the idea that dative is more likely to appear if the nominative and accusative of the subject are the same. The selected verbs are *langa* (want), *dreyma* (dream), *svíða* (sting) and *klæja* (itch), all subject to Dative Substitution. An account of the distribution is presented and its theoretical implications discussed. The following questions are addressed: Is the distribution restricted by grammatical factors? How different are the speakers in their variation? Is variation the norm when it comes to these verbs?

Methodology: The study is based on an online survey with 280 participants, the collection of naturalistic data through Google searches and the analysis of 18 blogs. Research on intra-speaker variation in language acquisition is being conducted. The survey consisted in filling gaps by choosing between accusative and dative subjects representing the abovementioned variables. The participants could also choose both accusative and dative but rarely did. The naturalistic data were collected by analyzing the search results for most possible pronoun combinations with the verbs *langa* and *vanta* in the present indicative. The search results for *klæja* and *svíða* were not numerous enough to be used in a pertinent way. The aim of the analysis of the naturalistic data was to find out if the pronoun patterns appeared with differing amounts of variation, e.g. whether there is more variation in examples of speakers using the first person singular and the third person plural, compared to the first person singular with the third person singular.

Main results: I argue that the distribution is restricted by grammatical factors. This seems to be the case for person, number and possibly nominative/accusative syncretism. As can be seen in table 1, accusative is most common with pronouns in the first and second person singular but least common with pronouns in the third person plural. This pattern is confirmed by the naturalistic data (4). It can also be noted (3) that the rate of accusative is lower in the pronouns that have nominative/accusative syncretism. Still, individual speakers are very different and can be roughly divided into three groups displaying either no variation at all, predictable/systematic variation or random variation: Some participants in the survey displayed no variation at all despite being asked to choose between accusative and dative 56 times. Others showed a seemingly random variation. Predictability was found in the blog analysis. For example, one blogger uses accusative in the first and second person of the singular but dative otherwise. These groups support different analyses; the predictability suggests that the accusative might be a dative in disguise; the dative being in the underlying structure despite the (learned) accusative forms. On the other hand, the variability might

support an acquisition of probabilities like the one proposed by Kroch (1989) and Yang (2002).

- (1) Mig vantar hníf → Mér vantar hníf
me (acc.) needs a knife me (dat.) needs a knife
- (2) Speaker 1: Mig vantar hníf en hann vantar gaffal
me (acc.) needs a knife but him (acc.) needs a fork
Speaker 2: Mér vantar hníf en honum vantar gaffal
me (dat.) needs a knife but him (dat.) needs a fork
Speaker 3: Mig vantar hníf en honum vantar gaffal
me (acc.) needs a knife but him (dat.) needs a fork
- Inter-speaker variation
- Intra-speaker variation

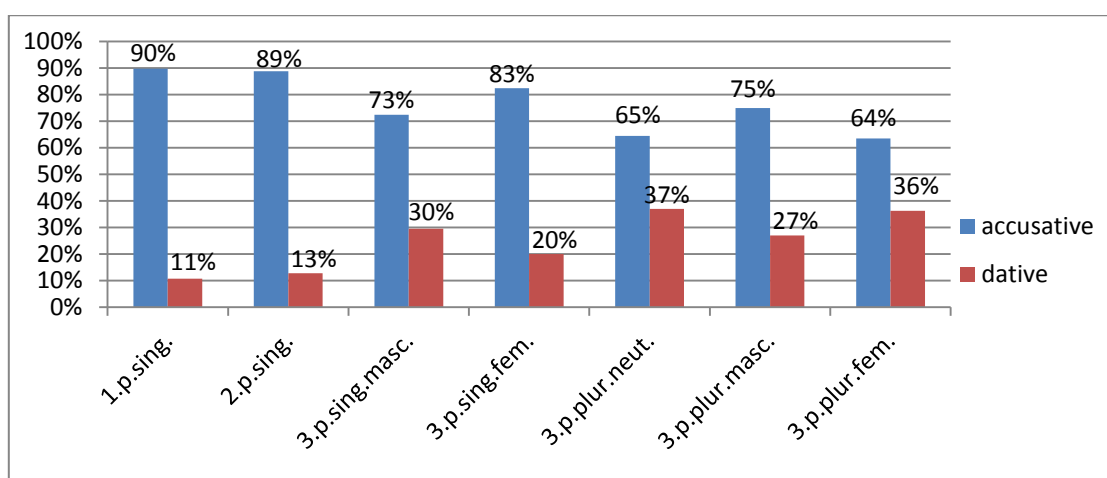


Table 1. Results from the online survey for *langa*, *vanta*, *svíða* and *klæja*. The 3.pers.sing.neut. was omitted because of the lack of naturalistic data. The 1. and 2. pers.plur. were also omitted as they present acc./dat. syncretism.

- (3) **Pronouns in order of their accusative rate in the online survey:**
1.p.sing. and 2.p.sing. - 3.p.sing.fem. - 3.p.plur.masc. and
3.p.sing.masc. - 3.p.plur.fem. and 3.p.plur.neut. nom./acc. syncretism
- (4) **Pronoun combinations with the highest rate of variation in the naturalistic data:**
a. 1.p.sing./3.p.plur. with the 1.p. in acc. and the 3.p. in dat. (mig/þeim)
b. 2.p.sing./3.p.plur. with the 2.p. in acc. and the 3.p. in dat. (þig/þeim)

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