

Icelandic deverbal adjectives and case-alternations

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We discuss the syntax and argument structure of Icelandic deverbal adjectives ending in *-anleg* ‘-able’ (1), which we argue have important implications for our understanding of the syntactic features responsible for argument interpretation and case-marking. Specifically, the preservation or non-preservation of dative on objects cannot depend directly on the presence or absence of the functional head encoding external-argument semantics, contrary to recent approaches.

Like *-able* adjectives in English (e.g. *doable*), and similar adjectives cross-linguistically, *-anleg* adjectives (AAs) are of two classes: a productive/predictable class derived from a verbal base, and an unproductive/unpredictable class with no direct relation to a verbal base (Kayne 1981, Fabb 1984, Roeper 1987, Volpe 2005, Oltra-Massuet 2010); here, we focus on the productive class. This class has been argued to be similar to the passive, and has been claimed to contain a functional head (such as Voice) responsible for external-argument semantics (Roeper and van Hout 1999, 2009; Oltra-Massuet 2010; Anagnostopoulou and Samioti 2012). While there are well-known restrictions on the implicit agent for such adjectives, the presence of one is suggested, cross-linguistically and for AAs, by the availability of agent-oriented instruments (1), comitatives (2), and ‘by’-phrases (3).

Accounting for agentive semantics with a Voice_{PASSIVE} head, however, runs into a problem: recent work on case-alternations has tied the availability of dative on underlying objects to the availability of a thematic Voice head. While datives stay dative in verbal passives (4a), which have an implied agent, they become nominative in *-st* middles and adjectival passives (4b–c), which do not. Svenonius (2006) proposed that dative is lost in middles and adjectival passives because Voice is necessary to assign dative but is absent in these constructions. Schäfer (2008) linked dative to Voice, claiming that non-thematic “expletive” Voice_{EXPL} is incompatible with the dative feature. Sigurðsson (2012) proposed that Voice_{EXPL} erases the case properties of a dative-assigning *v*⁺ head, a process he calls “case-star deletion” (CSD). For these accounts, a thematic Voice in AAs would incorrectly predict adjectives like *breytanleg* ‘changeable’ to assign dative case to the theme (see 1 versus 4a). Non-preservation is all the more striking in comparison to *-andi* participles (5), which are case-preserving and have “-able-like” semantics (Sigurðsson 1989:340–343).

We propose an account with CSD but no primitive expletive/passive features of Voice. CSD is an impoverishment rule applying in a marked set of environments, for example in the context of an adjectivizing “little a” head, or when “middle *-st*” is in SpecVoiceP (6). AAs are derived by attaching *-leg* to *-andi* (i.e. *-andi-leg* → *-an-leg*) (Kvaran 2005:140). Following Bruening (2012), *-an* realizes an Asp(ect) head which selects a specifierless VoiceP: it checks Voice’s D-feature (Wood 2012), making it specifierless, and existentially closes over its agent role, deriving its passive-like properties (7). This predicts the stem of AAs is always morphologically transitive (8). Our proposal incorporates several important conclusions: CSD has multiple sources, case-alternations are not directly connected to the presence/absence of external-argument semantics, and “passive” is not a primitive notion in grammar.

- (1) Sláttufjarlægð er **breyt-anleg með yfirtengi dráttarvélar.**
cutting.depth.NOM is change-able with control.rod tractor's
'The cutting depth is changeable with a tractor's control rod.' (attested)
- (2) Rómantískar gamanmyndir eru **njót-anlegar með maka manns.**
romantic comedies are enjoy-able with spouse one's
'Romantic comedies are enjoyable with a spouse.'
- (3) Er ekki hægt að endurskoða þau þegar nauðsyn krefur;
is not possible to reinspect them when need arises
skrifuð af mönnum **breyt-anleg af mönnum?**
written by people change-able by people
'Isn't it possible to reexamine them when the need arises;
written by people, changeable by people?' (attested)
- (4) a. Verbal Passive b. -st Middle c. Adjectival Passive
Því var breytt. **Það** breyttist. **Það** var breytt (*af þeim).
it.DAT was changed it.NOM changed-ST it.NOM was changed (*by them)
'It was changed.' 'It changed.' 'It was in a changed state.'
- (5) **Pólitíkusum** er vel mót-andi.
politicians.DAT is quite bribe-ing
'Politicians are quite **briable**.' (Sigurðsson 1989:342)
- (6) $v^{*+} \rightarrow v / \{ [_{AP} a \dots ___, [_{VoiceP} -st \text{ Voice } \dots ___, \dots] \}$
- (7) $[_{AP} a \ [_{AspP} Asp \ [_{VoiceP} Voice_{(D)} \ [_{VP} v^{*+} \ [\sqrt{\text{breyt}} DP]]]]$
-leg -an(di) change
- (8) a. Þeir **brjót-a** glugga. b. Gluggar **brotn-a**.
they.NOM break windows.ACC windows.NOM break
c. Gluggar eru {**brjót-anlegir**/***brotn-anlegir**}.
windows.NOM are {break-able /*break-able }

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