

## The glory of non-agreement: The rise of a new passive<sup>1</sup>

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### 1 Introduction

This talk is intended to shed some light on the development of the so-called New Passive in Icelandic with special focus on Dat-Nom constructions.

The New Passive has been the topic of a lively discussion in the recent years (Bernódusson 1982; Kjartansson 1991; Sigurðsson 1989; Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir 2002; Sigurjónsdóttir & Maling 2001; Sigurjónsdóttir, forthcoming; Barðdal & Molnár 2003; Árnadóttir 2006, 2008; Thráinsson 2007; Benediktsdóttir 2008; Eythórsson 2008; Jónsson, forthcoming a). The reason is not the least Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir's claim that the construction is an impersonal active but not a passive construction (as e.g. Eythórsson 2008 and Jónsson, forthcoming a, claim).

- (1) Hún var Barin Canonical Passive  
she.NOM was beaten.F.SG  
'She was beaten.'

In the canonical passive in Icelandic, the nominative subject corresponds to an accusative object of the active voice. The finite verb *vera* 'be' and the participle *barinn* 'beaten' agree with the subject. In the New Passive, on the other hand, the DP stays in postverbal position (and is not assigned nominative case) and the finite verb and the participle do not agree with it, but turn up in the default 3.p. neuter singular:<sup>2</sup>

- (2) Það var barið hana New Passive  
it<sub>expl</sub> was beaten.N.SG her.ACC  
'She was beaten.'

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<sup>2</sup> This goes against Burzio's Generalization (Burzio 1986:178):

(i) All and only the verbs that can assign  $\theta$ -role to the subject can assign (accusative) Case to an object.

Similarly, in canonical passive of ditransitive verbs the direct object shows up in nominative case (if accusative in the active voice) and the participle agrees with it. The dative DP is nevertheless usually the subject and the nominative DP an object:

- (3) Mér var gefinn bíll  
 me.DAT was given.M.SG car.M.NOM.SG  
 'I was given a car.'

The New Passive of ditransitive verbs :

- (4) Það var gefið mér bíl  
 it<sub>expl</sub> was given.N.SG me.DAT car.M.ACC.SG  
 'I was given a car.'

Here both DPs are inside the VP, in object position. Still examples with the dative DP in subject position are possible (cf. Jónsson, forthcoming a):

- (5) Mér var gefið bíl  
 me.DAT was given.N.SG car.M.ACC.SG  
 'I was given a car.'

Apart from these New Passive sentences, examples with non-agreeing participle and a nominative object occur, mostly unnoticed in the literature (though see Benediktsdóttir 2008).

- (6) Á 72. mínútu var dæmt vítaspyrna ...  
 on 72nd minute was judged.N.SG penalty.F.NOM.SG  
 'On the 72nd minute, a penalty kick was given.'  
<http://www.fotbolti.net/fullStory.php?id=52437>

Similar examples are attested with ditransitive verbs in passive:

- (7) málið er að mér var gefið hún í afmælisgjöf  
 thing- is that me.DAT was given.N.SG she.NOM in birthday  
 the present  
 'The thing is, it [a razor] was a birthday present.'  
[http://www.selt.is/102602,auction\\_id,item\\_watch,option,auction\\_details](http://www.selt.is/102602,auction_id,item_watch,option,auction_details)

The question is: Are those examples relevant for our understanding of the New Passive? If so, how?

We think they are, and we point out similarities between non-agreeing passive of ditransitives (7) non-agreeing Dat-Nom structure in active voice (3) in Icelandic as explained in chapter 2.

## 2 Agreement and Dat-Nom verbs

### 2.1 Icelandic Dat-Nom verbs

In Icelandic, several verbs have a dative subject and a nominative object. Two varieties are possible, either the verb agrees with the nominative object (8a) or it appears in the default 3.p. singular (8b):

- (8) a. Mér líka bílarnir  
me.DAT like.3PL cars-the.NOM.PL  
'I like the cars.'
- b. Mér líkar bílarnir  
me.DAT like.3SG cars-the.NOM.PL

Most speakers seem to accept both varieties, with agreement or without, although there is some preference for the non-agreeing type (Jónsson, forthcoming b).

Apart from these two standard varieties, examples with a non-agreeing verb plus an accusative object can be found (b, c and d are taken from the Internet):

- (9) a. Mér líkar bílana  
me.DAT like.3SG cars-the.ACC.PL
- b. En hey, hljómsveitin er samt ekki slæm þó  
But hey band-the is still not bad though  
  
mér líkar hana ekki  
me.DAT like.3SG her.ACC not  
'But hey, the band isn't bad although I don't like it.'  
<http://www.hugi.is/rokk/articles.php?page=view&contentId=4940211>
- c. Hjúkket að mér áskotnaðist pening því  
Phew that me.DAT acquired money.ACC because  
  
hárið á mér var orðið frekar asnalegt..  
hair on me.DAT was become rather silly  
'What a relief that I got some money (by some luck) because my hair was looking rather silly.'  
[kjammi.blogspot.com/2002\\_11\\_03\\_archive.html](http://kjammi.blogspot.com/2002_11_03_archive.html)
- d. Leiðist þessa askotas íþrótt  
bored.3SG this.F.ACC.SG devil's sport.F.ACC.SG  
'I find this darn sport [handball] boring.'  
<http://www.hugi.is/handbolti/threads.php?page=view&contentId=6077154>

## 2.2 Accounting for the Dat-Nom verbs in Icelandic

Case is morphologically manifested in Icelandic. Still, it is distinguished from abstract Case.<sup>3</sup> English has only to some extent morphological case but, no less than Icelandic, it has got abstract Case, cf. the Case Filter (Chomsky 1981, 1995):

(10) Every phonetically realized NP must be assigned (abstract) Case.

Abstract Case can then be distinguished into structural Case (nominative, accusative) and inherent Case (dative, genitive). However, e.g. Jónsson (1996) argues that inherent Case in Icelandic is invisible to the Case Filter and that it needs to check structural Case. That's important when accounting for Dat-Nom verbs (cf. also Yip, Maling, & Jackendoff 1987).

The standard view is to think of the nominative case on the object as structural nominative Case, even though nominative is not the most common case for an object.

We argue that the occurrence of an accusative object with verbs like *líka* 'like' must indicate that, for some speakers at least, the underlying Case of the object must be accusative Case, and thus the nominative case cannot be a structural nominative Case. The non-agreeing variant in (8b) we also take to be an indication of this, cf. Sigurðsson (1996), who argues that the nominative in such Dat-Nom constructions is in the process of being reanalyzed as inherent case.

Nominative is often said to be a necessary factor (see e.g. Sigurðsson, H. 2002) for finite verb agreement in Icelandic. It seems to us that morphological nominative case may not be the most relevant factor, but the underlying or abstract nominative Case. If that's correct, we would expect to find an argument with abstract nominative Case which is not equivalent to the morphological case (in the spell-out), controlling agreement. In fact, we find examples of that sort:

- (11) a. þar sem þeim líkuðu ekki þessi mikla  
 since that them.DAT liked.3PL not this.NOM.SG much.NOM.SG
- aukning á fylgi samkv. skoðanakönnunum  
 increasing.NOM.SG on following according polls  
 'Since they did not like this big increasing of votes according the polls.'  
[tiger.blog.is/blog/tiger/entry/110811/](http://tiger.blog.is/blog/tiger/entry/110811/)
- b. Svo lönguðu þeim að labba eiknað og ég  
 Then wanted.3PL them.DAT to walk somewhere and I
- dróst eftir þeim  
 was.dragged after them

<sup>3</sup> "Case" is capitalized when it's used in a technical sense (cf. Chomsky 1981:note 1, p. 16).

‘Then they wanted to walk somewhere and I (reluctantly) followed.’  
[hotties69.blogcentral.is/eldra/2006/7/](http://hotties69.blogcentral.is/eldra/2006/7/)

c. ... og ákváðu að vekja alla af því að  
 and decided.3PL to wake.up everyone of that to

**þeim leiddust.**

them.DAT were.bored.3PL

‘... and [they] decided to wake everyone up because they were bored.’

[vinvinvin.blogspot.com/2003\\_04\\_01\\_archive.html](http://vinvinvin.blogspot.com/2003_04_01_archive.html)

In these examples the verb seems to agree in number with the (morphological) dative object. In example a) the object is singular and therefore it cannot have triggered the plural form of the verb and in example c) there is no object. The plural form of the verb must be due to the subject being plural – and abstract nominative.

We conclude from this data, i.e. the loss of agreement with nominative object, the agreement with dative subject and the change of object case from nominative to accusative, that for Dat-Nom verbs in Icelandic we have abstract nominative Case on the subject (that is morphologically dative), and abstract accusative Case on the object (that is morphologically nominative):

(12)	Mér	líkar	bílarnir
	Morphological:	DAT	NOM
	Abstract:	str. NOM	str. ACC
		‘I like the cars.’	

We find similar development in Faroese.

### 2.3 *Dat-\*Nom verbs in Faroese*

Similar to the change in Dat-Nom verbs in Icelandic (to Dat-Acc), Faroese verbs that originally had this same Dat-Nom system now have Dat-Acc (Barnes 2001):

(13)	Mær	líkar	henda	filmin
	me.DAT	like.3SG	this	film.M.ACC.SG (*NOM)
		‘I like this film.’		

Nominative object in this case is ruled out. If nominative is structural as object case this means that one structural case, nominative, is substituted for another one, accusative, which is the default object case (Eythórsson & Jónsson 2003:216–217). But why would that happen?

Dative experiencers subjects in Faroese tend to be replaced by nominative (Nominative Substitution). Eythórsson & Jónsson (2003) point out that with Dat-Nom verbs that first the object has to change from nominative to accusative

(Accusative Object Substitution). Otherwise we would expect to find two nominative arguments of the same verb. The next step in (13) would then be to replace nominative subject *mær* ‘me.DAT’ with nominative *eg* ‘I.NOM’.

Using Eythórsson & Jónsson’s (2003:216–217) examples (9)–(11) we see the chronological order of these changes:<sup>4</sup>

- (14) a. Honum tókti skatturin ov lítil  
 him.DAT thought tax-the.NOM too small.NOM
- b. Honum tókti skattin ov lítlan  
 DAT ACC ACC obj. NOM > ACC
- c. Hann tókti skattin ov lítlan subj. DAT > NOM  
 NOM ACC ACC

According to this, some Icelandic speakers have evolved to stage b (obj. NOM > ACC), cf. (9) above.

Also: Agreement with dative objects is found in Faroese (cf. (11) above; Jónsson & Eythórsson 2005:240–241):

- (15) Teimum dáma sera væl at ganga í skúla ...  
 them. DAT like.3PL very well to walk in school  
 ‘They like it a lot, going to school.’  
<http://www.baran.fo/sida72>

### 3 The New Passive in Icelandic: The loss of agreement

#### 3.1 From structural to inherent nominative and structural accusative Case

Let’s look at passive of ditransitive verbs in Icelandic:

- (16) a. Mér var gefinn bíll  
 me.DAT was given.M.SG car.M.NOM.SG  
 ‘I was given a car.’
- b. Mér voru gefnir bílar  
 me.DAT were given. M.PL car.M.NOM.PL  
 ‘We were given cars.’

Here, the finite verb and the participle agree with the nominative object. Then the nominative is structural Case (see e.g. Jónsson 1996). But then there are

<sup>4</sup> Examples (14a–b) are from Barnes (1986:126, (91a–b) but Eythórsson & Jónsson site p.c. with Hjalmar Petersen in (14c).

examples similar to the ones in (16) but without agreement (sentence (7) repeated here as (17b)):

- (17) a. Mér var gefið bíll  
me.DAT was given.N.SG car.M.NOM.SG
- b. málið er að mér var gefið hún  
thing-the is that me.DAT was given.N.SG she.NOM
- í afmælisgjöf  
in birthday present  
'The thing is, it [a razor] was a birthday present.'  
[http://www.selt.is/102602,auction\\_id,item\\_watch,option,auction\\_details](http://www.selt.is/102602,auction_id,item_watch,option,auction_details)
- c. Þegar mér var gefið miði ...  
when me.DAT was given.N.SG ticket.M.NOM.SG  
'When I was given a ticket ...'  
<http://gastone.blog.is/blog/gastone/>

Example (17a) is identical to (16a) except for the non-agreement. But it surely is questionable to say that the speaker re-analyzes the structural nominative as inherent Case (then we would expect nominative in the active as well!). However, it looks like the change is similar to the re-interpretation of Dat-Nom verbs (such as *Mér líkar bílarnir* 'me.DAT like.3SG cars-the.NOM.PL'). So, maybe it's more like a re-interpretation of a certain type of construction?

The next step in the development is the change of the "inherent" nominative to structural Accusative, leading to morphological accusative (b and c are taken from Internet sites):

- (18) a. Mér var gefið bíl  
me.DAT was given.N.SG car.M.ACC.SG  
'I was given a car.'
- b. ... vini mínum var gefið hana ...  
friend.M.DAT mine.M.DAT was given.N.SG her.ACC  
'It [a computer] was given to my friend.'  
<http://spjall.vaktin.is/viewtopic.php?f=11&t=7324>
- c. Ég fór í bíó með vinum mínum eftir að  
I.NOM went in cinema with friends mine after that
- mér var gefið miða á Fantastic Four  
me.DAT was given.N.SG ticket.M.ACC.SG on F.  
'I went to the movies with my friends when I was given a ticket to F.'  
<http://kvikmyndir.is/KvikmyndirMovie/entry/movieid/3042>  
[Click "Notendur" for the sentence]

This is similar to the change from inherent nominative of Dat-Nom verbs to structural accusative (*Mér líkar bílana* ‘me.DAT like.3SG cars-the.ACC.PL’).

In the last step of the development of the New Passive (of ditransitive verbs) the dative argument is not promoted to subject position and stays in situ:

- (19) a. Það var gefið mér bíl  
 it<sub>expl</sub> was given.N.SG me.DAT car.M.ACC.SG  
 ‘I was given a car.’
- b. Við komum þarna og það var  
 we came there and it<sub>expl</sub> was
- gefið okkur yndislegan mat  
 given.N.SG us.DAT lovely.M.ACC.SG food.M.ACC.SG  
 ‘We came there and we were given a lovely food.’

The Icelandic Dat-Nom construction might later on follow a similar path as English (cf. *I like her*) and Faroese (14c) Dat-Nom verbs, i.e. with a nominative subject and accusative object.

English also developed a new passive (starting in late 14th century) of ditransitive verbs, e.g. (Allen 2001; the OE example from her (6)):

- (20) OE and him wearð geseald an snæd flæsces  
 and him (DAT) was given a piece (NOM) flesh
- ME He (NOM) was given a piece (ACC) of flesh

If we take a look at (19), it seems unlikely that Icelandic will follow the same path in this respect.

### 3.2 Faroese

According to Barnes (2001:127, examples (96)–(97)), passives of some ditransitive verbs, such as *ynskja* ‘wish’, with accusative object, seem to be better than with nominative:

- (21) a. Honum varð ynskt eina góða ferð  
 him.DAT became wished.N.SG a.F.ACC.SG good F.ACC.SG trip.F.ACC.SG  
 ‘He was wished a good journey.’
- b. ?Honum varð ynskt ein góð ferð  
 him.DAT became wished.N.SG a F.NOM.SG good F.NOM.SG trip. F.NOM.SG



Furthermore, Eythórsson (2008) says that the Icelandic New Passive construction, cf. (2) above, only seems possible with ditransitives, and not with monotransitives:

- (22) Tað varð lovað henni eina teldu  
 it<sub>expl</sub> was promised her.DAT a.F.ACC.SG computer.F.ACC.SG  
 ‘She was promised a computer.’

### 3.3 Some problems

One problem for our proposal regarding re-analyzing structural nominative in passives of ditransitive verbs is low frequency of examples with inherent nominative (and non-agreement) found in texts (e.g. in blogs). If, as we argue, this is relevant for the change, the inherent nominative stage must precede the structural Accusative and not vice versa.

Another problem, related to the low frequency, is how sudden the change is diachronically, from Nominative object to Accusative in ditransitive passives. Why isn't the period of non-agreement longer, as with Dat-Nom verbs? In addition to this, one of the oldest attested examples of the New Passive Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir (2002:129) give includes a ditransitive verbs, *gefa* ‘give’, but the dative argument is already at that time, in the grammar of that particular speaker, not promoted to subject position:

- (23) Það var gefið mér nammi  
 it<sub>expl</sub> was given.N.SG. me.DAT candy.N.NOM/ACC  
 ‘Someone gave me candy.’ (girl, born in Akranes, 1951)

(Note that morphology doesn't show whether *nammi* ‘candy’ is nominative or accusative and whether *var gefið* ‘was given’ agrees with it or not.)

The third problem is how to account for the change in passives of single object verbs with regard to passives of double object verbs:

- (24) a. Það var dæmd vítaskylda  
 it<sub>expl</sub> was judged.F.SG penalty.F.NOM.SG  
 ‘A penalty kick was given.’  
 b. Það var dæmt vítaskylda  
 it<sub>expl</sub> was judged.N.SG penalty.F.NOM.SG  
 c. Það var dæmt vítaskyldu  
 it<sub>expl</sub> was judged.N.SG penalty.F.ACC.SG

## 4 Conclusion

To summarize, we have shown the similarities between the development of Dat-Nom verbs in Icelandic and passives of ditransitive verbs:

(25) a.	Mér var gefinn bíll 'I was given a car.'	(26) a.	Mér líka bílar 'I like cars.'	agreement nom.-object
b.	Mér var gefið bíll	b.	Mér líkar bílar	non-agreement nom.-object
c.	Mér var gefið bíl	c.	Mér líka bílar	acc.-object

We have proposed that the nominative case of an object in Dat-Nom verbs in Icelandic is not structural. We argue that it is an inherent nominative case but has underlying accusative Case. The indication of this is the lack of agreement with the nominative object and the change of the nominative into accusative for some speakers.

In the second part of this talk we (hopefully!) showed how changes in the passive of ditransitive verbs resemble the changes in dat-nom verbs. The passive construction, like the Dat-Nom construction, shows lack of agreement and a change from nominative object to accusative object. We do not necessarily want to claim that the new passive emerged through ditransitive verbs (with the lack of agreement as an important step) but we hope that shedding some light on the Dat-Nom construction may help us understanding the nature of the new passive.

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