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CHAPTER 6

The New Passive in Icelandic really is a passive

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Contra the standard account by Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir (2002), I argue that the New Passive in Icelandic is a passive without NP-movement but with structural accusative case assignment. The absence of structural accusative in the Canonical Passive and its presence in the New Passive is attributed to parametric variation in a case feature in a functional head taking a VP complement. Thus, the New Passive is comparable to the *-no/to*-construction in Ukrainian, a passive preserving structural accusative case. Moreover, parallels in Norwegian and Faroese are pointed out. Finally, I propose that the New Passive emerged from a reanalysis of the canonical existential passive (*það*-passive) with a postverbal NP. The locus for the reanalysis involves cases where the canonical existential passive without NP-movement and the New Passive cannot be distinguished morphologically.

1. Introduction

A syntactic change currently underway in Icelandic involves a construction exhibiting passive morphology which is variously termed the New Passive (Icel. *nýja þolmyndin*; Kjartansson 1991) or the New Impersonal Construction (Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir 2002). For now I label it the New Construction (NC). As shown in (1), the NC contains the auxiliary *vera* ‘be’ and a non-agreeing past participle which is able to assign accusative case to an argument in postverbal position. The postverbal NP can be either definite, as in (1a-b), or indefinite, as in (1c). The expletive *það* ‘it’ is inserted before the finite verb, in the absence of another initial element. As is generally the case in Icelandic, the expletive functions as a placeholder and not as an argument.¹

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|-----|--|----|
| (1) | a. Það var barið mig.
it was beaten.N.SG me.ACC
‘I was beaten.’ | NC |
| | b. Það var barið litla strákinn.
it was beaten.N.SG little.DEF.ACC boy.the.ACC
‘The little boy was beaten.’ | NC |
| | c. Það var barið lítinn strákur.
it was beaten.N.SG little.ACC boy.ACC
‘A little boy was beaten.’ | NC |

The Canonical Passive is also formed with the auxiliary *vera* ‘be’ and a past participle, which, however, exhibits agreement with a nominative NP. It occurs in two kinds of clauses. On the one hand, these are clauses involving full NP-movement, i.e. movement to the canonical subject position (‘SpecIP’), as in (2a); this is the ‘typical’ instantiation of passive, henceforth labeled Full Passive. On the other hand, there are

existential clauses containing the expletive *það* ‘it’ (the *það*-passive), as in (2b-c), in which the ‘associate’ NP of the expletive is in a structurally ‘lower’ position, surfacing either to the left or to the right of the participle. In the NC the postverbal NP can be definite, but the canonical *það*-passive (2b-c) only allows indefinite NPs.

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|-----|--|---------|
| (2) | a. Ég var barinn .
I.NOM was beaten.M.NOM
‘I was beaten.’ | CanPass |
| | b. Það var lítill strákur barinn .
it was little boy.M.NOM beaten.M.SG
‘A little boy was beaten.’ | CanPass |
| | c. Það var barinn lítill strákur .
it was beaten.M.SG little boy.M.NOM
‘A little boy was beaten.’ | CanPass |

The first mention of the NC in Icelandic seems to be in Bernóðsson (1982:212). A couple of years later the construction was noted in a newspaper column by a well-known Icelandic language purist, urging his readers to correct children if they heard them using it (Hálfðanarson 1984:31). The NC was briefly discussed by Sigurðsson (1989:355-356), but Kjartansson (1991) was the first to examine it in some detail. Then, in the fall and winter of 1999-2000, the construction was subjected to an extensive survey by Joan Maling and Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir (Sigurjónsdóttir and Maling 2001, Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir 2002, Maling 2006). According to Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir,² the NC is mostly confined to the speech of children and adolescents; however, older speakers are known to use it, although it is unclear at which age they would have acquired it. The oldest documented examples unambiguously involving the NC date from the mid-20th century. According to Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir’s survey, the NC is found in all parts of the country, but it is least common in the central/western part of the capital, labeled by them ‘Inner Reykjavík.’ Given that this area is where the level of education is the highest in the country, the diffusion of the innovation is clearly socially conditioned.

The synchronic status and the historical origins of the NC in Icelandic are debated. In the papers just cited, Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir have analyzed it as an ‘impersonal active’, containing a thematic null subject which must be [+human]. Furthermore, they claim that the NC does not have parallels in other Nordic or Germanic languages, but that there are typological parallels further afield, in particular in Polish and Irish. Finally, Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir claim that the NC arose from the passive of intransitive verbs (‘impersonal passive’) which was reanalyzed as an ‘impersonal active’ construction, and spread to transitives via passive of reflexive verbs. Other scholars, however, have argued that the construction is in fact passive, despite the unusual characteristics, and have suggested different accounts of its emergence (Kjartansson 1991, Guðmundsdóttir 2000:111-113, Barðdal and Molnár 2003:244-248, Eythórsson 2005).

In this paper I examine the arguments which have been brought forth for the status of the NC (see also Thráinsson 2007). I show that these arguments do not favor an active analysis along the lines of Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir, and therefore I conclude that the construction really is a passive despite the accusative case marking of the postverbal NP, in breach of Burzio’s Generalization, which states that a verb case-marks its object only if it θ -marks its subject (Burzio 1986:178; see Lavine 2005 for a recent discussion of a comparable construction in Ukrainian; cf. section 5.4 below).

However, in order not to prejudice the discussion, I will continue using the label New Construction (NC) until a conclusion regarding its status has been reached. In addition to the analysis of the NC, I propose a scenario about its emergence and development in Icelandic, and point out some parallels in closely related languages, in particular in Norwegian and Faroese, which have so far not figured in this discussion.

The organization of the paper is as follows: In section 2 I give a brief descriptive overview of the main characteristics of the Icelandic Canonical Passive of transitive verbs as opposed to the NC. In section 3 I discuss ‘impersonal’ constructions involving passive morphology (‘impersonal passive’) that can be formed to intransitive verbs. In section 4 I report on the main results of the study by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir, as well as the analysis they propose of the NC as an ‘impersonal active.’ I subject their arguments to a fresh examination and show that they do not unambiguously favor an active analysis. In section 5 I evaluate the arguments for the NC as an impersonal active and present fresh ones for the position that this construction really is a passive. In section 6 I discuss the accusative case marking of the postverbal NP and point out some parallels to the Icelandic NC. In section 7 I present a scenario of the historical origins of the NC, arguing that it results from a reanalysis of the existential variant of the Canonical Passive without NP-movement. Section 8 concludes the paper.

2. Transitive verbs: The Canonical Passive vs. the New Construction

2.1 Introduction

In this section I give a brief descriptive overview of the main characteristics of the Icelandic Canonical Passive of transitive verbs as opposed to the New Construction (NC). Starting with monotransitive verbs, in subsection 2.2.1 I discuss the two variants of the Canonical Passive, the Full Passive and the *það*-passive, and in subsection 2.2.2 I discuss the NC. Section 2.3 deals with ditransitive verbs, treating both the Canonical Passive and the NC.

2.2 Monotransitives

2.2.1 *The Canonical Passive*

As stated at the outset, in Icelandic the Canonical Passive is formed with the auxiliary *vera* ‘be’ and a past participle, which exhibits agreement with nominative NPs. With monotransitive verbs the internal argument (object) in an active sentence, as in (3), shows up as the subject of a passive sentence.

- (3) Einhver lamdi **stúlkuna**. Active
 someone beat girl.the.F.ACC
 ‘Someone beat the girl.’

The Canonical Passive occurs in two kinds of clauses. On the one hand, the ‘typical’ instantiation of passive, here labeled Full Passive, occurs in clauses involving full NP-movement, i.e. movement to the canonical subject position (‘SpecIP’), as in (4). On the other hand, there are existential clauses introduced by the expletive *það* in the

absence of another initial element (the *það*-passive), as in (5); the associate NP of the expletive must be indefinite, occurring in a position that is structurally lower than the canonical subject position. The NP can occur either to the left or to the right of the participle; in other words, it can either undergo ‘short movement’ leftward, or remain *in situ* in the object position (for a discussion, see Sigurðsson 2000, Thráinsson 2007: 271).

- (4) **Stúlkan** var lamin. CanPass
 girl.the.F.NOM was beaten.F.NOM.SG
 ‘The girl was beaten.’
- (5) a. Það var lamin **stúlka**. CanPass
 it was beaten.F.NOM.SG girl.F.NOM
 ‘A girl was beaten.’
 b. Það var **stúlka** lamin. CanPass
 it was girl.F.NOM beaten.F.NOM.SG
 ‘A girl was beaten.’

Due to the Definiteness Effect (DE) exhibited by the *það*-passive, the sentences in (6) are ungrammatical. In this respect the existential passive patterns with other transitive expletive clauses in Icelandic, whereas the NC does not (see 2.2.2 below).³

- (6) a. *Það var lamin **stúlkan**.
 it was beaten.F.NOM.SG girl.the.F.NOM
 b. *Það var **stúlkan** lamin.
 it was girl.the.F.NOM beaten.F.NOM.SG

In subject-verb inversion contexts, for example topicalizations and yes/no-questions, the element *það* is absent.⁴

- (7) a. Í gær var lamin **stúlka**. CanPass
 yesterday was beaten.F.NOM.SG girl.F.NOM
 ‘Yesterday a girl was beaten.’
 b. Í gær var **stúlka** lamin. CanPass
 yesterday was girl.F.NOM beaten.F.NOM.SG
 ‘Yesterday a girl was beaten.’
- (8) a. Var lamin **stúlka** í gær? CanPass
 was beaten.F.NOM.SG girl.F.NOM yesterday
 ‘Was a girl beaten yesterday.’
 b. Var **stúlka** lamin í gær? CanPass
 was girl.F.NOM beaten.F.NOM.SG yesterday
 ‘Was a girl beaten yesterday.’

Dative and genitive case with objects of active sentences is ‘preserved’ in the Canonical Passive, the past participle occurring in the default neuter singular. The finite verb is in the default third person singular. These oblique NPs pass the usual subject tests in Icelandic and are therefore on a par with other oblique subjects (cf. Zaenen, Maling & Thráinsson 1985 and many others). The examples in (9b) and (10b) involve Full Passives.⁵

- (9) a. Einhver hrinti **henni** í skólanum. Active
 someone pushed her.DAT in school.the
 ‘Someone pushed her in school.’
 b. **Henni** var hrint í skólanum. CanPass
 her.DAT was pushed.N.SG in school.the
 ‘She was pushed in school.’
- (10) a. Einhver saknaði **kennarans**. Active
 someone missed teacher.the.GEN
 ‘Someone missed the teacher.’
 b. **Kennarans** var saknað. CanPass
 teacher.the.M.GEN was missed.N.SG
 ‘The teacher was missed.’

The same applies to *það*-passives: the dative and genitive is ‘preserved’ and the past participle is in the default third person singular. In (11) the NP occurs postverbally and in (12) the NP precedes the participle.

- (11) a. Það var hrint **stelpu** í skólanum. CanPass
 it was pushed.N.SG girl.DAT in school.the
 ‘A girl was pushed in school.’
 b. Það var saknað **kennara**. CanPass
 it was missed.N.SG teacher.GEN
 ‘A teacher was missed.’
- (12) a. Það var **stelpu** hrint í skólanum. CanPass
 it was pushed.N.SG girl.DAT in school.the
 ‘A girl was pushed in school.’
 b. Það var **kennara** saknað. CanPass
 it was missed.N.SG teacher.GEN
 ‘A teacher was missed.’

As in passives involving nominative NPs (6a), the DE is regularly observed in the Canonical Passive of verbs taking dative and genitive, and therefore (13) and (14) are ungrammatical.

- (13) a. *Það var hrint **stelpunni** í skólanum. CanPass
 it was pushed.N.SG girl.the.DAT in school.the
 b. *Það var saknað **kennarans**. CanPass
 it was missed.N.SG teacher.the.GEN
- (14) a. *Það var **stelpunni** hrint í skólanum. CanPass
 it was girl.the.DAT pushed.N.SG in school.the
 b. *Það var **kennarans** saknað. CanPass
 it was teacher.the.GEN missed.N.SG

It should be noted, however, that the sentences in (13), as well as the ones in (11), involving a postverbal NP, would be grammatical for speakers accepting the NC. In

the canonical *það*-passive with dative and genitive NPs there is no participial agreement. These are among the cases in which the canonical *það*-passive with a postverbal NP and the NC cannot be distinguished morphologically. Such ambiguous cases will be shown to be important for an account of the emergence of the NC (see section 7.2).

In Icelandic the agentive PP is generally accepted in the Full Passive, although it is more restricted than the *by*-phrases in English (for details, see Thráinsson 2007: 272, fn. 12).

- (15) **Stúlkan** var lamin af **óknyttadrengjum**. CanPass
 girl.the.F.NOM.SG was beaten.F.NOM by bullies
 ‘The girl was beaten by bullies.’

On the other hand, the occurrence of agentive PPs with *það*-passives is a lot more restricted, in a similar way as the ‘impersonal passives’ discussed in section 3 below. In particular, as shown in (16), there are certain differences in this respect between canonical *það*-passives in which the NP precedes the participle (short NP movement) and those in which the NP follows the participle (NP *in situ*). Some speakers (including Ottósson 1989:9 and the present author) find sentences such as (16b) with a postverbal NP less felicitous than the ones with a preverbal NP, as in (16a).

- (16) a. Það var lítill strákur **laminn** af óknyttadrengjum. CanPass
 it was little boy.M.NOM.SG beaten.M.NOM.SG by bullies
 ‘A little boy was beaten by bullies.’
 b. ??Það var **laminn** lítill strákur af óknyttadrengjum. CanPass
 it was beaten.M.NOM.SG little boy.M.NOM.SG by bullies
 ‘A little boy was beaten by bullies.’

In the absence of an agentive PP both sentences in (16) are equally good. Incidentally, a similar kind of restriction on *það*-passives holds for other phenomena as well, for example Conjunction Reduction (17). Again, *það*-passives followed by a second conjunct clause are deemed less acceptable by some speakers if the NP is postverbal, as in (17b), than if it is preverbal, as in (17a).

- (17) a. Það var lítill strákur **laminn** og fór að gráta. CanPass
 it was little boy.M.NOM.SG beaten.M.NOM.SG and began to cry
 ‘A little boy was beaten and began to cry.’
 b. ??Það var **laminn** lítill strákur og fór að gráta. CanPass
 it was beaten.M.NOM.SG a little boy.M.NOM.SG and began to cry
 ‘A little boy was beaten and began to cry.’

Thus, given that agentive PPs and Conjunction Reduction can be considered criteria for the subjecthood of the internal argument in the *það*-passive, it would appear that the postverbal NP is in some sense more ‘objectlike’ than the preverbal NP. I will return to this matter further below (section 7.2).⁶

2.2.2 The New Construction

In the New Construction (NC) the postverbal NP is in the accusative with verbs assigning accusative in active sentences. There is no participial agreement, the past participle being in the default third person singular. Just as in the existential passive, the placeholder *það* ‘it’ is inserted, in the absence of another element in clause-initial position.⁷

- (18) a. *Það var lamið stúlku.* NC
 it was beaten.N.SG girl.ACC
 ‘A girl was beaten.’
 b. *Það var lamið stúlkuna.* NC
 it was beaten.N.SG girl.the.ACC
 ‘The girl was beaten.’

As the DE does not hold in the NC, the postverbal NP can be either indefinite or definite.⁸ Note, finally, that agentive PPs are generally not accepted in the NC (cf. 5.5.1 below).

It should be stressed that there are no reported examples of the NC where the NP occurs to the left of the participle (i.e. having undergone short NP movement). So, presumably, the sentences in (19) and (20) would be ungrammatical for speakers who accept the NC (as well as the speakers who do not, of course). Notice that (19a) would not violate the DE, whereas (19b) and (20a-b) would.

- (19) a. **Það var stelpu lamið.*
 it was girl.ACC beaten.N.SG
 b. **Það var stelpuna lamið.*
 it was girl.the.ACC beaten.N.SG
- (20) a. **Það var stelpunni hrint í skólanum.*
 it was girl.the.DAT pushed.N.SG in school.the
 b. **Það var kennarans saknað.*
 it was teacher.the.GEN missed.N.SG

According to Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir’s findings, the Canonical Passive and the NC are used side by side; there do not seem to be any speakers who only accept the NC and not the Canonical Passive. Moreover, any semantic or pragmatic difference between the constructions is unclear as of yet, and remains to be established.

As we have seen, in some cases there is a formal ambiguity between the Canonical Passive and the NC, so that the two constructions cannot be distinguished on morphological grounds. For example, as shown in (21), there is no morphological distinction in the singular between nominative and accusative with neuter nouns. Therefore, with verbs assigning accusative case in the active, it would only seem to be possible to distinguish between the Canonical Passive and the NC on the basis of definiteness. However, even this is not a waterproof criterion, as there can be a ‘leakage’ in the DE. Thus, the ban on the occurrence of definite NPs in postverbal position can exceptionally be violated, so that (21b) might involve the Canonical Passive rather than the NC (hence CanPass is in brackets in examples of that kind).

- (21) a. Það var skammað **lítið barn**. CanPass/NC
 it was scolded.N.SG little.NOM/ACC child.NOM/ACC
 ‘A little child was scolded.’
 b. Það var skammað **litla barnið**. NC (CanPass)
 it was scolded.N.SG little.NOM/ACC child.the.NOM/ACC
 ‘The little child was scolded.’

Similarly, with dative and genitive NPs only the DE would seem to distinguish the canonical *það*-passive and the NC (cf. (11) and (13) above).⁹ The examples in (22a) and (23a), containing indefinite postverbal dative and genitive NPs, are ambiguous between the canonical *það*-passive and the NC. The (b)-sentences, on the other hand, are more clearly instantiations of the NC as they contain definite NPs, although even here a ‘leakage’ in the DE cannot be excluded.

- (22) a. Það var hrint **stelpu** í skólanum. CanPass/NC
 it was pushed.N.SG girl.DAT in school.the
 ‘A girl was pushed in school.’
 b. Það var hrint **stelpunni** í skólanum. NC (CanPass)
 it was pushed.N.SG girl.the.DAT in school.the
 ‘The girl was pushed in school.’
- (23) a. Það var saknað **kennara**. CanPass/NC
 it was missed.N.SG teacher.GEN
 ‘A teacher was missed.’
 b. Það var saknað **kennarans**. NC (CanPass)
 it was missed.N.SG teacher.the.GEN
 ‘The teacher was missed.’

Thus, in the existential variant of the Canonical Passive (the *það*-passive) the DE is generally observed so that only indefinite NPs can occur, but in the NC the NPs can be either indefinite or definite (either a full NP or a pronoun). However, the DE is not without exceptions.

The morphological overlap between the Canonical Passive with a postverbal NP and the NC is particularly noticeable with heavy NPs. Definite NPs in postverbal position often occur among speakers who generally do not seem to allow the NC, especially if the NP is heavy. The sentence in (24a) is taken from a book published in 1944, in which there do not appear to be any unambiguous examples of the NC. The sentence in (24b), recently heard by the present author, was uttered by a well-educated male in his late fifties who does not normally seem to use or accept the NC.

- (24) a. Það verður boðið **öllum þeim, sem mig langar til að hafa**.¹⁰
 it becomes invited.N.SG all those that me wants for to have
 ‘All who I want to be present will be invited.’
 b. Það var **skilað töskunni hennar**. (male, 59 years old)
 it was returned.N.SG bag.the.DAT her
 ‘Her bag was returned.’

Such cases need not involve the NC, with the NP base-generated in object position. Rather, it is likely that the heavy definite NP has been extraposed to the right from the

canonical subject position, into which an expletive is inserted. The following example illustrates the rightward extraposition of a heavy definite subject NP with the verb *ráða* ‘hire’, which assigns accusative case in the active; the fact that the postverbal NP in (25b) preserves the nominative case (agreeing with the past participle) shows that this is not an instance of the NC but of the Full Passive with heavy NP extraposition and *það*-insertion:

- (25) a. **Frægi skoski þjálfarinn hjá Manchester United** CanPass
 famous.DEF Scottish.DEF coach.the.NOM at Manchester United
 var ráðinn í starfið.
 was hired.NOM for job.the
 ‘The famous Scottish coach at Manchester United was hired for the job.’
- b. **?Það** var ráðinn í starfið **frægi skoski þjálfarinn** CanPass
 it was hired.NOM for job.the famous.DEF Scottish.DEF coach.the
hjá Manchester United.
 at Manchester United

An unambiguous example of the NC would have to involve either an accusative NP or a non-heavy dative or genitive NP.

Some speakers of Modern Icelandic who mostly seem to use the Canonical Passive can occasionally be heard producing unambiguous NC sentences. This fact raises the issue of (i) how old the NC is and (ii) at which age it is acquired (i.e. whether it is exclusively linked to child language acquisition or whether it can be acquired by adults, at least to some extent). An additional question involves violations of the DE which can be observed in existential constructions in the standard language and may have contributed to the rise of the NC. A systematic study of these matters is a task for future investigation.

In this connection it is worth mentioning that there are some examples in Old Icelandic which look very much like the Modern Icelandic NC.¹¹ All the reported examples, however, seem to involve dative NPs, and neither accusative NPs nor pronouns. Nevertheless, here the postverbal definite NP is not heavy, so from a Modern Icelandic perspective rightward extraposition seems unlikely.¹²

- (26) a. Og er upp var lokið **hurðunni**.
 and when up was opened.N.SG door.the.DAT
 ‘And when the door was opened.’
- b. Var þá farið upp á húsin og riðið **skálanum**.
 was then gone.N.SG up on houses.the and ridden.N.SG hall.the.DAT
 ‘Then someone went up on the house and rode on the ridge of the hall.’
- c. Var ýtt **skipinu**.
 was pushed.N.SG ship.the.DAT
 ‘The ship was pushed.’

Crucially, however, the DE with extraposed NPs appears to have been less strict in Old Icelandic than in Modern Icelandic, although even in the modern language violations of the DE can be found, as we have seen. Therefore, the status of these sentences is uncertain. A convincing example of the NC in Old Icelandic would have to involve a pronoun in an oblique case, or a full NP in the accusative.¹³

It should, however, be recalled that cases in which the two constructions – the canonical *það*-passive with a postverbal NP and the NC – cannot be distinguished

morphologically are important as they arguably provide a clue to the emergence of the NC. Moreover, both in Old and Modern Icelandic there can be violations of the DE with the postverbal NP in the existential variant of the Canonical Passive. Such exceptional cases, involving a ‘leakage’ in the DE, may have paved the way for the crucial innovation involved in the NC, i.e. the assignment of structural accusative case to the postverbal NP.

2.3 Ditransitives

Passive in Icelandic can be formed to ditransitive verbs, i.e. verbs taking a double object. In the Canonical Passive of ditransitive dative-accusative verbs the direct accusative object of an active sentence shows up in the nominative and the participle exhibits agreement with the nominative object. The indirect (dative) object preserves its case and is usually the subject of the passive sentence. The example in (27b) involves a Full Passive:

- (27) a. Vinur minn gaf **mér þessa bók.** Active
 friend mine gave me.DAT this.F.ACC book.F.ACC
 ‘A friend of mine gave me this book.’
 b. **Mér** var gefin **þessi bók.** CanPass
 me.DAT was given.F.NOM.SG this.F.NOM book.F.NOM
 ‘I was given this book.’

In the canonical *það*-passive of ditransitives the DE is observed so that the dative subject must be indefinite, occurring either to the left or to the right of the participle. It seems that, although not ungrammatical, the postverbal position of the indefinite NP is somewhat less felicitous than the preverbal one, as indicated by the question mark in (29a).¹⁴

- (28) a. Það var **einhverjum strákk** gefin **þessi bók.** CanPass
 was some.DAT boy.DAT given.F.NOM this.F.NOM book.F.NOM
 ‘Some boy was given this book.’
 b. *Það var **mér** gefin **þessi bók.**
 it was me.DAT given.F.NOM this.F.NOM book.F.NOM
- (29) a. ?Það var gefin **einhverjum strákk** **þessi bók.** CanPass
 it was given.F.NOM some.DAT boy.DAT this.F.NOM book.F.NOM
 ‘Some boy was given this book.’
 b. *Það var gefin **mér** **þessi bók.**
 it was given.F.NOM me.DAT this.F.NOM book.F.NOM

In the NC with ditransitives, on the other hand, the indirect object of the active sentence occurs to the right of the participle and can be definite, whereas the direct object is in the accusative. In (30) the direct object is neuter singular, and therefore it is unclear whether it is accusative or nominative, and hence whether or not participial agreement is involved (M/S 39b, M/S 40c).¹⁵

- (30) Það var gefið **mér nammi** / lýsi. NC
 it was given.N.SG me.DAT sweets.N.SG.ACC(?)/cod.liver.oil.N.SG.ACC(?)
 ‘I was given sweets / cod liver oil.’

Unfortunately, Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir do not provide an unambiguous example showing the accusative case of the direct object. The following sentence, however, heard by the present author, contains the verb *spyrja* ‘ask’, which has both the indirect object and the direct object in accusative case.¹⁶

- (31) Það var spurt **mig eina spurningu**. NC
 it was asked.N.SG me.ACC one.ACC question.F.ACC (girl, 15 years old)
 ‘I was asked one question.’

As expected, in the NC the direct object stays accusative and there is no participial agreement. In the examples known to me the direct object is indefinite, but there is no reason to assume that definite NPs are excluded in principle in the NC with ditransitives.

Moreover, the direct object can be clausal with ditransitive verbs, e.g. with verbs such as *segja* ‘say’ (DAT-ACC) and *biðja* (ACC-GEN) (33). The canonical *það*-passive of these verbs is only possible with indefinite indirect object NPs, preferably occurring to the left of the participle (32):

- (32) a. Það var **einhverjum stráku**m sögð þessi saga. CanPass
 it was some.DAT boys.DAT told.NOM this.NOM story.NOM
 ‘Some boys were told this story.’
 b. Það var **einhver stráku**r beðinn bónar. CanPass
 it was some.NOM boy.NOM asked.NOM favor.GEN
 ‘Some boy was asked a favor.’
- (33) a. Það var **einhverjum stráku**m sagt að skrifa ritgerð. CanPass
 it was some.DAT boys.DAT told.N.SG to write essay
 ‘Some boys were asked to write an essay.’
 b. Það var **einhver stráku**r beðinn að vaska upp. CanPass
 it was some.NOM boy.NOM asked.N.SG to wash up
 ‘Some boy was asked to do the dishes.’

In the NC, on the other hand, the indirect object of the active sentence occurs postverbally and can be definite (M/S 19a-b).

- (34) a. Það var beðið **mig að vaska upp**. NC
 it was asked.N.SG me.ACC to wash up
 ‘I was asked to do the dishes.’
 b. Það var sagt **mér að taka til**. NC
 it was told.N.SG me.DAT to clean up
 ‘I was told to clean up.’

Finally, in this connection mention should be made of a passive-like construction in Icelandic which is formed to ditransitive verbs taking a reflexive indirect object and a direct object; typically the indirect reflexive object is dative and the direct object accusative. In this construction, which may be labeled the Impersonal Ditransitive

Reflexive Construction (IDRC), the dative is preserved with the reflexive and the accusative is preserved with the direct object. Only a limited number of verbs are attested in the IDRC; apparently, the most common one is *fá* ‘get’ (35a-b), but other verbs, such as *kaupa* ‘buy’ (35c), are also known to occur in it. The NP corresponding to the direct object of the active is mostly indefinite, although a few examples involving a definite NP have been found, e.g. (35b).¹⁷

- (35) a. *Það var fengið sér öllara.* IDRC
 it was got.N.SG REFL.DAT beer.ACC
 ‘People got themselves a beer.’
- b. *Það var fengið sér morgunkornið.* IDRC
 it was got.N.SG REFL.DAT morning.cereals.the.ACC(?)
 ‘People had some cereals.’
- c. *Það var keypt sér pizzu.* IDRC
 it was bought.N.SG REFL.DAT pizza.ACC
 ‘People bought themselves pizza.’

It should be emphasized that the Canonical Passive cannot be formed to these reflexive verbs.¹⁸ In other words, the NP corresponding to the direct object of the active is apparently never nominative.

- (36) a. **Það var fenginn sér öllari.*
 it was got.NOM REFL.DAT beer.NOM
- b. **Öllari var fenginn sér.*
 beer.NOM was got.NOM REFL.DAT
- (37) a. **Það var sér fenginn öllari.*
 it was REFL.DAT got.NOM beer.NOM
- b. **Sér var fenginn öllari.*
 REFL.DAT was got.NOM beer

The IDRC, although it is restricted to only a few ditransitive verbs, seems to be quite widespread in a very informal register of colloquial Icelandic, and to be used by speakers for whom the NC with verbs taking non-reflexive objects is ungrammatical. What is particularly interesting about this construction is the fact that the ‘NC’ variant has no ‘canonical’ pendant. Thus, here we have a passive-type construction in which the internal argument cannot be assigned a structural nominative case, but is instead assigned a structural accusative case. As in other structures which do not contain a nominative form, there is no participial agreement. A detailed examination of the use of this construction awaits further study.¹⁹

3. Intransitive verbs: ‘Impersonal’ constructions

In Icelandic an impersonal construction exhibiting passive morphology can be formed to intransitive verbs; as usual, it is introduced by *það* ‘it’ if there is no element in clause-initial position. Both unergative verbs of various kinds and at least some unaccusative verbs can occur in this construction, which is traditionally labeled ‘impersonal passive’. The past participle is in the default third person singular form.

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (pp. 126-128, 132-134; see also Maling 2006) indicate that, for some speakers of Modern Icelandic, the passive of intransitive verbs involves a thematic null subject, and is thus an NC type construction; in fact, they propose that this is the original locus of the NC (cf. section 7.3). While I disagree with this interpretation, I will use the more neutral label Impersonal Construction (ImpC) rather than ‘impersonal passive’ until I have examined the arguments presented by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (section 4 below). It should be noted that an agent cannot in general be referred to in a PP (‘by-phrase’) in the ImpC (Thráinsson 2007:270).

In Icelandic, as in other Germanic languages except English, unergative verbs can occur in the ImpC. This is true both of unergatives proper, e.g. *dansa* ‘dance’ (38a), and transitive verbs used intransitively, e.g. *lesa* ‘read’ (38b).

- (38) a. Það var **dansað** alla nóttina. ImpC
 it was danced.N.SG all night.the
 ‘People danced all night.’
 b. Það var **lesið** á kvöldin í gamla daga. ImpC
 it was read.N.SG in evenings.the in old days
 ‘People used to read in the evening in the old days.’

Moreover, unergative verbs taking a PP complement can occur in the ImpC.²⁰

- (39) Það var **leikið** á mig. ImpC
 it was played.N.SG on me
 ‘I was tricked.’

More unusually, in Icelandic a number of unaccusative verbs can occur in the ImpC, for example *koma* ‘come’, *fara* ‘go’, *detta* ‘fall’, *hverfa* ‘disappear’, as well as the verb *vera* ‘be’.

- (40) Það var **komið** (**farið**, **verið**...). ImpC
 it was arrived.N.SG (gone.N.SG, been.N.SG...)
 ‘People arrived (went, were...).’

Some unaccusative verbs in Icelandic cannot occur in the ImpC, however, including the verb *deyja* ‘deyja’. This restriction would appear to depend on the lexical semantics of these verbs rather than on any syntactic properties.

In addition to the types of verbs just discussed, certain verbs that take infinitival or finite clause complement also occur in the ImpC, including ‘control verbs and aspectuals’ (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir, p. 172; cf. Sigurðsson 1989:64).

- (41) a. Það var **reynt** að berja gestinn. ImpC
 it was attempted.N.SG to beat guest.the
 ‘People tried to beat up the guest.’
 b. Það var **sagt** að gesturinn hefði farið. ImpC
 it was said.N.SG that guest.the had gone
 ‘It was said that the guest had gone.’
- (42) Það var **verið** (**farið**/**byrjað**/**hætt**...) að moka snjóinn í gær. ImpC
 it was been.N.SG (gone/begun/stopped.N.SG) to shovel snow.the yesterday
 ‘People were (began/started/stopped...) shoveling snow yesterday.’

The above types of the ImpC are found already in Old Icelandic. Furthermore, at least some speakers of Modern Icelandic can form ImpC to reflexive verbs. This is the case both with inherently reflexive verbs (43a) and those which take an optional reflexive object (i.e. the reflexive can be replaced by an NP) (43b).

- (43) a. Það var **leikið sér** allan daginn. ImpC
 it was played.N.SG REFL.DAT all day
 ‘People played all day.’
- b. Það var **baðað sig** á laugardögum. ImpC
 it was bathed.N.SG REFL.ACC on Saturdays
 ‘People took a bath on Saturdays.’

Impersonalization (‘passivization’) of reflexive verbs has been considered marginal by some researchers, e.g. Sigurðsson (1989:355, fn. 60), from whom the examples in (43) are taken. In fact, Sigurðsson gives (43a) a question mark, and (43b) two question marks, but I do not agree with this judgement, nor do most speakers I have consulted, so I omit the question marks here. I have not been able to find any cases of ImpC with reflexive verbs in Old Icelandic; an investigation into its origins is pending. Thus, the reflexive ImpC seems to be an innovation of Modern Icelandic which is increasingly gaining ground and is accepted by many speakers who do not accept the NC with non-reflexive verbs (cf. Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir, p. 122). The same is true of the Impersonal Ditransitive Reflexive Construction discussed in section 2.3 above.

4. The study by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir

4.1 Introduction

In this section I report on the main results of the study by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir regarding the diffusion of the NC. I also present a critical review of the basic claims they make on the status and emergence of the NC, as well as parallels in other languages.

4.2 Diffusion, social factors

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir tested 1731 students (age 15-16) in 65 schools throughout Iceland and 205 adults serving as a control group. Excluding subjects who made more than one error on the ungrammatical control sentences, they evaluated the results from 1695 students (845 males and 850 females), and 200 adults. According to Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir, their results corroborate the view that the NC is mostly confined to the speech of children and adolescents. However, older speakers are known to use it, although it is unclear at which age they would have acquired it. The oldest example of the NC documented in Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir dates from 1959 (M/S 39a), which shows that the construction has existed at least since the mid-20th century.²¹

As for the geographic distribution of the change, Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir claim that their survey shows that the NC occurs in all parts of the country, but that it is least common in the central/western part of Reykjavík, labeled by them ‘Inner

Reykjavík.’ Interestingly, according to their findings, there is a divide between Inner Reykjavík and the suburbs in the eastern part of Reykjavík (labeled ‘Outer Reykjavík’), and for the latter the statistics are similar to those for the rest of the country (together Outer Reykjavík and the rest of the country are termed ‘Elsewhere’). A probable reason for this difference has to do with education of the subjects’ parents, as it is Inner Reykjavík where the level of education is the highest in the country. In fact, the study found that there is an inverse relationship with education, in particular that of the mother; the higher the education of the mother, the lower the occurrence of the NC (and vice versa). Thus, the diffusion of the innovation is clearly socially conditioned.²² On the other hand, the fact that the NC appears equally common in all parts of the country, except Inner Reykjavík, is in accordance with the view that there are hardly any significant regional syntactic differences in Iceland.²³

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir’s questionnaire included examples of both the Canonical Passive and the NC (cf. the test sentences in Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002:135-140). It is important to note that the results indicate that the NC occurs alongside the Canonical Passive among the speakers who use it. Any pragmatic or semantic difference there may be between the two constructions awaits further investigation.

4.3 Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir’s analysis of the NC: a critical review

In addition to the study of the diffusion and distribution of the NC, Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir present an analysis of the construction and its origin, making three basic claims (labeled here M/S Claims 1-3):

- M/S Claim 1: The construction is not a passive but an impersonal active containing a null subject.
- M/S Claim 2: The construction does not have parallels in other Nordic or Germanic languages, but there are typological parallels further afield (Polish, Irish).
- M/S Claim 3: The construction first emerged in passive of intransitive verbs (‘impersonal passive’) and is spreading to transitives via reflexives.

As to M/S Claim 1, two possible analyses are considered:

- | | | |
|------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (44) | a. [e] var barið mig | Passive without NP-movement |
| | b. [<i>pro</i>] var barið mig | Impersonal active |
| | was beaten.N.SG me.ACC | |

On the analysis in (44a), the NC is a variant of the Canonical Passive, with an empty category *e* in subject position but without NP-movement. The analysis in (44b), on the other hand, takes the new construction to be an impersonal active with a null subject pronoun (*pro*) which must be [+human].²⁴ Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir argue for the analysis in (44b) which will henceforth be labeled the Impersonal Active Hypothesis (IAH).

In section 5 below I show that the predictions of Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir in favor of an active construction with a null subject pronoun are not borne out. So instead I defend the hypothesis in (44a) that the NC really is a passive which, however, has the following characteristics: first, it does not involve promotion of the object (no NP-

movement), and is thus similar to the canonical *það*-passive with a postverbal NP; second, the postverbal NP is assigned accusative rather than nominative case; and third, there is no restriction on the postverbal NP by the Definiteness Effect (DE).

According to M/S Claim 2, the NC does not have a match in other Nordic or Germanic languages but in more distantly related languages, in particular in Polish and Irish. As a consequence of my analysis, however, I argue that the NC in Icelandic is indeed comparable – *mutatis mutandis* – to accusative passives that have been shown to occur in Ukrainian (Sobin 1985, Lavine 2005) and other languages. Moreover, I point out parallels to the Icelandic NC in the more closely related Mainland Scandinavian, notably in Norwegian, as well as in Faroese, despite certain differences relating to the DE (see section 6).

Finally, on M/S Claim 3 the NC originated in intransitives of the following type (M/S 42a):

- (45) *Það var flautað.*
 it was whistled.N.SG
 ‘Somebody whistled.’

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir argue that in Icelandic, as in other Germanic languages, ‘the understood agent of an impersonal passive can only be interpreted as a human’ (p. 131). Citing Maling (1993), they further claim that this semantic generalization ‘sets the stage for the reanalysis of a thematically empty null subject as a fully thematic *pro* external argument’ (p. 132). Once the passive construction has been reanalyzed as a syntactically active construction, the [+human] restriction is argued to fall out naturally from the fact that ‘thematic role, e.g., agent, is not a classificatory feature for pronouns whether overt or null’ (p. 132). Based on their study of the NC in Icelandic, Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir propose that the first stage after the reanalysis is the extension of the impersonal passive to inherently reflexive predicates, and that this then extends to non-inherent reflexives and other bound anaphors (p. 133; cf. also p. 122).

In section 5.5 I show that this view is not plausible. As an alternative, I propose that the emergence of the NC results from a reanalysis of the canonical existential passive (*það*-passive) with a postverbal NP. The locus for the reanalysis involves cases in which the Canonical Passive without NP-movement and the New Passive cannot be distinguished morphologically. The ambiguous structures give rise to a resetting of a case parameter (\pm accusative) in favor of accusative case assignment. This account is preferable to the one proposed by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir as it assumes only a minimal parametric difference between the Canonical Passive and the New Construction, and not two different constructions with distinct grammatical functions. In the remainder of the paper I present my counterarguments to Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir in more detail.

5. The status of the NC: active or passive?

5.1 Introduction

In this section I focus on M/S Claim 1: the question whether the NC in Icelandic is an impersonal active or a passive. I first examine the postverbal NP in the NC in order to determine whether it is a subject or an object (5.2). I then discuss the status of the NC

(5.3), presenting the criteria used by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir to distinguish the properties of impersonal constructions from passive, i.e. incompatibility with agentive PPs but compatibility with reflexives, subject-oriented adjuncts, and unaccusatives (5.4). Subsequently these properties are tested for Icelandic (5.5). Finally, I evaluate the findings on the status of the NC, bringing fresh arguments for the position that this construction really is a passive (5.6).

5.2 Postverbal NP: subject or object?

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir argue that the postverbal NP in the NC in Icelandic is an **object** rather than a subject. They present three arguments in favor of this analysis (pp. 100):

- (46) a. The NP has accusative case, not nominative case
 b. The NP does not pass subject tests, e.g. it *cannot* occur in subject position
 c. The NP can be definite (no Definiteness Effect)

The first argument (46a), according to which the NP is assigned structural accusative case, supports the analysis of the postverbal NP as an object. Although case is not a subject criterion in Icelandic *per se*, accusative is expected as a structural object case, not as a structural subject case. The corresponding accusative case of the active can be shown to be structurally assigned.

The second argument (46b) is also persuasive since the subject tests applied in the survey strongly suggest that the NP is not a subject. Crucially, an accusative NP immediately following the finite verb (in the canonical subject position, ‘SpecIP’) in direct questions is generally not accepted (M/S 24a).

	Accusative NP in canonical subject position	Else-where	Inner Rvík	Adults
(47)	Var stúlkuna <u>lamið</u> í klessu? was girl.the.F.ACC beaten.N.SG in mess ‘Was the girl beaten up?’	7%	3%	5%

It may be noted that it should not matter if the accusative NP were indefinite; the sentence should be equally bad (however, Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir do not present evidence bearing on this).

Finally, the third argument (46c) is sound as well since the DE in Icelandic normally pertains to subjects only, and not to objects. Although exceptions to the DE occur, there is nevertheless a clear difference between the NC and the canonical *það*-passive in this respect, as seen above (ex. (11-12) and (18-19)).

In summary, I agree with Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir that the postverbal NP is not a subject but an *object*. All of the tests in (46) are decisive, especially (46a) and (46b).²⁵ Test (46c) is also conclusive although the ban on definites is not without exceptions.

5.3 Impersonal active or passive?

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir claim that the NC is an impersonal active with a thematic null subject pronoun (*pro* [+human]). However, there are various arguments against this analysis of the NC.

First, the construction has a passive morphology: auxiliary *vera* ‘be’ + past participle. It might be considered remarkable to have an active construction with ‘be’ and a past participle (‘null’ [= *someone*] *was beaten me* = ‘someone beat me’). However, such a construction is not in principle excluded, witness for example the so-called deponent verbs in Latin and other old Indo-European languages which have passive morphology but active meaning, e.g. the transitive verb *hortor* ‘I admonish’, *hortatus sum* ‘I have admonished’ (literally: ‘I am admonished’) which takes an accusative object. Thus, there does not in principle have to be a one-to-one relation between morphology and grammatical function.²⁶

More seriously, the status of the alleged null subject in such an active construction would be dubious, given that the occurrence of null subjects in Modern Icelandic is very limited. Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (p. 134) suggest as a parallel the Impersonal Modal Construction (IMC) in Icelandic, which arguably contains a non-referential *pro* (which must be [+human]) (Sigurðsson 1989:161, 162ff., 233ff).

- (48) Það á að gefa börnum brauð. IMC
 it must to give.INF children.DAT bread.ACC
 ‘Children are to be given bread.’

However, the IMC has active morphology unlike the NC, involving a biclausal construction with a PRO infinitive embedded under an active main verb in the matrix clause. Moreover, in the IMC there is the possibility of an overt subject, for example *einhver* ‘someone’.

- (49) Það á **einhver** að gefa börnum brauð. IMC
 it must someone.NOM to give.INF children.DAT bread.ACC
 ‘Somebody must give the children bread.’

In the NC, on the other hand, an overt subject cannot occur at all. Thus, a sentence such as (50) is completely out for all speakers, irrespective of whether or not they accept the NC (hence the double asterisk). I conclude that the NC is not comparable to the IMC.

- (50) **Það var einhver barið mig.
 it was someone.NOM beaten.N.SG me.ACC
 Intended meaning: ‘Someone beat me.’

Second, any semantic difference there may be between the NC and the Canonical Passive is unclear, as indicated earlier. According to Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir’s survey, the two constructions seem to be used side by side; there do not seem to be any speakers who only accept the NC and not the Canonical Passive. It must be emphasized that the NC should in particular be compared to the canonical *það*-passive, especially the pattern with a postverbal NP, rather than the Full Passive.²⁷

Third, the NC does not seem to be compatible with various verbs that do not form Canonical Passive, e.g. oblique subject verbs and most middle verbs (cf. Ottósson 1989, Thráinsson 1994, 2007: ch.5). This is unexpected on Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir’s (2001:172, fn. 54) active analysis; supposedly, on their account, the null subject would not necessarily be restricted to agents. If the NC were an active construction it should not be subject to the same restrictions as the Canonical Passive. If, however, the construction really is a passive such restrictions are of course

unsurprising. This fact would seem to be a strong argument against the analysis of the NC as an impersonal active.

On the basis of these points I conclude that Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir's claim that the NC is an impersonal active with a thematic null subject pronoun is not called for.

5.4 Properties of impersonal constructions (according to Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir)

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir assume that impersonal active constructions with a null subject have the following properties:

(51) Properties	Compatibility with impersonal active constructions
a. Agentive 'by-phrase' (PP, NP)	No
b. Binding of anaphors	Yes
c. Control of subject-oriented adjuncts	Yes
d. Unaccusative verbs	Yes

In other words, an agentive phrase (typically a PP or an oblique NP) should be incompatible with an impersonal active construction, whereas anaphors (reflexives, reciprocals), subject-oriented adjuncts, and unaccusative verbs should be compatible with it.

The properties proposed by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir were established primarily on the basis of a comparison between Ukrainian and Polish. These languages have both (i) a Canonical Passive and (ii) a construction labeled 'the *-no/to*-construction'. On the basis of the properties in (51) the *-no/to*-construction can be analyzed as a passive in Ukrainian but as an impersonal active in Polish. In both languages the NP is in the accusative (cf. also Blevins 2003, Sobin 1985, and Lavine 2005, all with further references). Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir contend that the NC in Icelandic has a match in the Polish impersonal active *-no/to*-construction, although it has developed from a Ukrainian-type construction.

In Ukrainian an agentive 'by-phrase' (realized as an NP in the instrumental case) is grammatical in the *-no/to*-construction but bound anaphors (reflexives), subject-oriented adjuncts and unaccusatives are ungrammatical in this construction (M/S 12). Note that the copula is optional, and is omitted in (52a) and (52d).²⁸

(52) a. Mojim mylym mene zradženo. my.INST beloved.INST me.ACC betrayed.PASS 'I was betrayed by my beloved.'	'by-phrase' (Instr)
b. *Svoju žinku bulo obmaneno. REFL.POSS wife.ACC was deceived.PASS Intended: 'Someone deceived his wife.'	Reflexive
c. *Povernuvšys' dodomu, hroši bulo znajdeno. returning home money was found.PASS Intended: 'Having returned home, the money was found.'	Adjunct
d. *Umerto/*Zaxvoreno/*Pryjixano died/got.sick/arrived.PASS Intended: 'Someone died/got sick/arrived.'	Unaccusative

Conversely, in Polish an agentive PP cannot be used in the *-no/to-*construction, whereas reflexives, subject-oriented adjuncts and unaccusatives can (M/S 10).

- (53) a. *Jana ograbowano* (***przez nich**). 'by-phrase' (PP)
 John.ACC robbed.IMP by them
 'They robbed John (*by them).'
- b. *Zamknięto się w fabryce*. Reflexive
 locked.IMP REFL in factory
 'They locked themselves in the factory.'
- c. *Jana ograbowano* po pijanemu. Adjunct
 John.ACC robbed.IMP while drunk
 'They robbed John (while they) were drunk.'
- d. *Dawniej umierano* młodo. Unaccusative
 before died.IMP young
 'In the old days, people died at a young age.'

Given the different properties of the *-no/to-*construction in Ukrainian and Polish, it would seem that it really is a passive in Ukrainian, irrespective of the fact that accusative case is assigned to the NP (cf. Sobin 1985, Lavine 2005, and Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir, p. 102-106).²⁹

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that there are several additional differences between Ukrainian and Polish constructions, suggesting that they have very different syntactic properties. I only mention here two of the most salient differences: First, there is no auxiliary in this construction in Polish, whereas an auxiliary occurs optionally in Ukrainian (and has both a finite and a non-finite form). The second property is that the construction is restricted to a past tense reading in Polish but not in Ukrainian (Lavine 2000 and Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir, p. 106).

In conclusion, a different analysis of the *-no/to-*construction in the two languages is justified: it is an impersonal active in Polish but, despite the accusative case marking, it is to be considered a passive in Ukrainian.

5.5 The properties tested for Icelandic

5.5.1 Agentive PPs

As discussed above (section 2.2.1), agentive PPs are grammatical in the Canonical (Full) Passive in Icelandic, as shown in (54), from Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (M/S 27a), although they are more restricted than in English, for example.

	Full Passive	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults
(54)	<i>Honum var sagt upp af forstjóranum</i> . him.DAT was fired.N.SG PTC by director.the 'He was fired by the director.'	87%	93%	90%

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir predict that if the New Construction is syntactically active as they hypothesize, the presence of an agentive PP should be ungrammatical. On the basis of the results of their survey they conclude that this prediction is largely

confirmed; while not fully ungrammatical among speakers who accept the NC, the agentive PP is significantly less acceptable than in the Canonical Passive (M/S 28b).

	NC	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults
(55)	Það var sagt honum upp af forstjóranum . it was fired.N.SG him.DAT PTC by director.the 'He was fired by the director.'	19%	9%	0%

However, this result is not clear-cut since agentive PPs are often awkward or even infelicitous in the canonical *það*-passive, especially when the NP follows the participle. In my judgement, the sentence with the postverbal NP in (56b) is less acceptable than the one with the preverbal NP in (56a).³⁰ In fact, example (56b) is ambiguous between a canonical *það*-passive and the NC. Without an agentive PP, I find that both sentences are equally good.

(56)	a. Það var <u>mörgu fólki</u> sagt upp (? af forstjóranum). it was many people.N.SG fired.N.SG PRT by director.the 'Many people were fired (by the director).'			CanPass
	b. Það var sagt upp <u>mörgu fólki</u> (?? af forstjóranum). it was fired.N.SG PRT many people.N.SG by director.the 'Many people were fired (by the director).'			CanPass/NC

Thus, agentive PPs are disfavored in *það*-constructions, both in the canonical existential passive (especially with a postverbal NP) and in the NC (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir, p. 120, including fn. 10). Whatever the reason for this restriction, the limited occurrence of agentive PPs in the NC does not provide conclusive positive evidence in favor of Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir's analysis of the NC as an impersonal active with a null subject.

5.5.2 Reflexives

According to Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir, if the NC is syntactically active, reflexives should be able to occur in it, as they would be bound by the hypothesized null subject. Their questionnaire contained thirteen sentences involving reflexives: four with a plain *sig* '-self' (accusative), two with a compound self-anaphor *sjálfan sig*, two with a reciprocal, and five with a possessive reflexive. An example of a plain reflexive *sig* is given in (57) (M/S 30a).

	Plain reflexive	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults
(57)	Svo var bara drifið sig á ball. then was just hurried.N.SG REFL.ACC to dance 'Then people just hurried to a dance.'	78%	67%	40%

As seen here, simple reflexive objects are judged highly acceptable, not only by the adolescents but by the adults as well, and this is also the case in two of the remaining sentences involving plain *sig* (M/S 30b-c).³¹ In fact, adolescents in Inner Reykjavík

were twice as likely, and the adults four times as likely, to accept a sentence with a reflexive object than to accept a sentence with a non-reflexive accusative object (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir, p. 122). These findings are in accordance with the discussion presented in section 3 above of the occurrence of reflexives in the ImpC ('reflexive passive'). The similarity between the age groups regarding plain *sig* in Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir's survey suggests that this construction has existed longer, or at any rate gained ground more rapidly, than the NC. The reason for the high acceptance rate of verbs with a plain reflexive may be that this element is not an object but rather an intransitivizing affix of sorts, attaching to the verb. Thus, reflexive verbs should be analyzed as unergatives rather than transitives (cf. Sells, Zaenen & Zec 1987).

Unfortunately, most of the other examples of reflexives in Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir are irrelevant because they either do not involve the NC at all, or are otherwise unsuitable as test sentences. This leaves only four examples of possessive reflexives that could be potential examples of NC. However, among these cases there is only **one** sentence (M/S 33b) which is accepted by a substantial number of subjects and shows a difference between the three subject groups.

	Reflexive possessive	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults
(58)	Á kvöldin var skoðað tölvupóstinn in evenings.the was viewed e-mail.ACC sinn . REFL.POSS.ACC 'In the evenings people checked their e-mail.'	32%	10%	2%

Now, one example is not much to build on, but it indicates that reflexive possessives pattern with non-reflexive arguments rather than simple reflexives, which, as mentioned, are not to be analyzed as 'objects' but as intransitivizing affixes. In any case, the occurrence of reflexive possessives in the NC would have to be studied in much greater detail in order to obtain conclusive results.

Finally, it should be pointed out that, for example, in English (Roberts 1987, Baker, Johnson & Roberts 1989, Collins 2005) and German (Sternefeld & Featherston 2003), reflexives and other bound anaphors can, at least to a limited degree, occur in passive, bound by an antecedent in the context. The following German examples are taken from Sternefeld and Featherston (2003: 243).

- (59) a. Ich erwarte, dass **sich** jetzt **gewaschen** wird.
I expect that REFL now washed becomes
'I expect that people wash now.'
- b. Hier wird **einander** nicht **gespitzelt**.
here becomes each.other not spied.on
'One does not spy on each other here.'

This shows that the occurrence of a bound anaphor is not necessarily an argument for a null subject. This fact further undermines Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir's claim that the compatibility of reflexives with the ImpC provides an argument for the IAH that reflexives occur in passives.

5.5.3 Subject-oriented adjuncts

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir predict that the thematic null subject of the hypothesized impersonal active can be a controller for the participial adjunct. Their questionnaire contained one example of the NC with a subject-oriented adjunct (M/S 37c). At a first glance the difference between the three groups in (60) would seem to provide striking support for their hypothesis.

	NC with a subject-oriented adjunct	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults
(60)	<p>Það var lesið minningargreinina grátandi. it was read.N.SG obituary.the.ACC crying 'People read the obituary crying.'</p>	62%	35%	4%

The problem with this example, however, is that it is probably not the adjunct *grátandi* 'crying' but the use of a transitive verb which makes the sentence ungrammatical for adult speakers. The figures for the adolescents, on the other hand, are not much different from those in (61) below, involving subject-oriented adjuncts with the unaccusative verbs *koma* 'come' and *fara* 'go' (M/S 37a-b). By contrast, as Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir mention (p. 126), approximately 50% of the adults accept subject-oriented adjuncts with these unaccusatives.

	ImpC with a subject-oriented adjunct	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults
(61)	<p>a. Það var komið skellihlæjandi í tímunn. it was come.N.SG laughing.out.loud into class 'People came to class laughing out loud.'</p> <p>b. Það var farið hágrátandi heim. it was gone.N.SG crying.loud home 'People went home crying loud.'</p>	68%	47%	52%
		61%	50%	49%

The sentence in (62), containing an unergative verb, is also generally accepted by Icelandic speakers who do not accept the NC (M/S 36). This is noted by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir, who concede that on their account it 'should be ungrammatical in the standard language because there is no referential agent subject to serve as controller for the participial adjunct' (p. 125).

(62)	<p>Það var dansað skellihlæjandi á skipinu. it was danced.N.SG laughing.out.loud on ship.the 'People danced on the ship laughing out loud.'</p>			ImpC
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Concerning the occurrence of intransitives in the ImpC, Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir propose (p. 126) that there are actually two different groups of native speakers and presumably two different grammars: one group for whom the relevant constructions involve passives of intransitive verbs (with a suppressed or implicit subject), and a second group for whom these constructions are impersonal actives (containing a thematic *pro* subject). Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir also state that there is a correlation between the results for subject-oriented adjuncts and those for simple reflexives: 'The more subject-oriented participles are accepted, the more simple reflexives are accepted' (p. 126). However, this is not a strong argument in favor of the IAH as the

correlation does not necessarily require the assumption that the NC involves a thematic null subject. It is equally comprehensible on the assumption that there are speakers who allow for an ‘underlying’ (i.e., an implicit or ‘dethematized’) agent as a controller of reflexives and subject-oriented adjuncts (cf. Barðdal & Molnár 2000: 128).

Moreover, the evidence Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir build their case on is far from straightforward. A significant number of both adults and adolescents accept simple reflexives and subject-oriented adjuncts with intransitives. However, as shown in (60), only a very small number (4%) of the adults accept the subject-oriented adjuncts with transitive verbs. It is unclear on Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir’s account why there should be such a big difference in acceptability between intransitives (including verbs with simple reflexives) and transitives in this respect. The diachronic argument that the NC began with reflexives and is thus more advanced with these is not valid. One would assume that speakers for whom the NC, containing the alleged thematic null subject, is grammatical would be able to use the adjuncts with transitive verbs just as with intransitives.

So once again the evidence intended by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir to support their analysis in fact does not. Moreover, the following consideration weakens their claim further still. Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir point out that certain adjuncts require a syntactic (subject) controller, and that therefore (63) is judged ungrammatical (M/S 35b).

- (63) ??Valsinn var dansaður **skellihlæjandi**. CanPass
 waltz.the.NOM was danced.NOM laughing.out.loud
 ‘People danced the waltz laughing out loud.’

In fact, however, such sentences improve given suitable context, as is indeed pointed out by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir themselves with respect to the example in (64a) involving a Full Passive (p. 125 n. 14 ex. (i), citing Höskuldur Thráinsson, p.c.). A further example is given in (64b).

- (64) a. Eftir að hljómsveitarstjórinn hafði sagt þennan CanPass
 after bandleader.the had told that
 brandara voru síðustu dansarnir dansaðir **skellihlæjandi**.
 joke were last dances.NOM danced.NOM laughing.out.loud
 ‘When the band leader had told that joke people danced the last dances
 laughing out loud.’
 b. Ferðin var farin **fótgangandi**.
 journey.the.NOM was gone.NOM on.foot
 ‘People went on the journey on foot.’

The fact that subject-oriented adjuncts can occur in the Canonical Passive of transitive verbs, as in (64), strongly suggests that the use of an adjunct depends on an implicit agent in the context; therefore the assumption of an impersonal active with a null subject is not needed.³²

5.5.4 *Unaccusatives*

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir claim (p. 126) that passives of unaccusatives verbs are ‘sharply ungrammatical’ in all the Germanic languages that allow intransitive verbs to form passives, including standard Icelandic.³³ They argue (p. 127) that their results, reproduced in (65), indicate that the New Construction is ‘beginning to extend its usage to nonagentive verbs which do not form passives in the standard language.’ In other words, Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir contend that the fact that unaccusative verbs can occur in the ImpC in (65) shows that it involves an impersonal active with a null subject rather than an impersonal (subjectless) passive (M/S 38a-b, d-e).

	ImpC with unaccusatives	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults
(65)	a. Það var dottið í hálkunni fyrir framan it was fallen.N.SG on ice.the in.front.of blokkina. apartment.block.the ‘People fell on the ice in front of the apartment block.’	55%	45%	25%
	b. Í morgun var komið of seint í skólann. in morning was come.N.SG too late to school ‘This morning people came too late to school.’	36%	38%	58%
	c. Það var horfið sporlaust í stjórnustríðinu. it was disappeared.N.SG traceless in star.war.the ‘People disappeared without a trace in the star war.’	30%	23%	22%
	d. Það var dáið í bílslysinu. it was died.N.SG in car.accident.the ‘People died in the car accident.’	14%	11%	2%

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (p. 128) further remark that the range of acceptability is extremely wide. However, the evidence in (65) does not warrant such a claim, as it is only *deyja* ‘die’ (65d) which stands apart. It should be noted that this verb scores low among the adolescents as well. I agree, however, with Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir’s (p. 128) further suggestion that some semantic factor must account for the difference between the acceptability of *deyja* ‘die’ and the other unaccusatives in the ImpC.³⁴

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir also speculate that the alleged changes in the lexical restrictions on a particular morphology are ‘the last stage’ in the reanalysis of impersonal passive to a syntactically active construction. But they acknowledge that adults like the first three sentences in (65) as much as the adolescents do – in fact, even more, as (65b) shows – and that, crucially, adults accept these examples of the ImpC to a much greater extent than they accept constructions with a definite postverbal object (i.e. true NCs).

The fact that the sentences in (65a-c) are accepted by many adult speakers manifests once again that there is a serious problem with Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir’s analysis; actually, it would seem that they are turning things on their head. It must be emphasized that this type of construction is not new in Icelandic; already in Old Icelandic there are examples of unaccusatives in the ImpC (cf. section 3). So the occurrence of an unaccusative in the ImpC does not support the IAH and there is no

need to assume a null subject. Depending on their lexical semantics, unaccusative verbs in Icelandic are compatible with the ‘impersonal passive’.

5.6 Evaluation and a new proposal

The predictions of Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir regarding the application of the properties listed in (51) to the NC are not borne out in a clear-cut way. In fact, they concede that ‘...the Icelandic “New Passive” represents the **first stages** [emphasis added, T. E.] of the reanalysis of the Canonical Passive morphology from passive to syntactically active’ (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir, p. 101). (The specifics of their historical account is examined in section 7.3.)

Moreover, in order to maintain their analysis, Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (cf. also Maling 2006) have to assume that an impersonal active with a null subject is not only involved in the NC, but also, for many speakers at least, in the ‘traditional’ impersonal construction (ImpC) with intransitive verbs, which, except for reflexives, is attested already in Old Icelandic.

It is clear that there is a lot of variation in speakers’ acceptance of all these constructions which might be taken to indicate the co-existence of an innovative ‘impersonal active’ and a passive construction. But matters are even more complicated than this because, as is clear from the evidence presented by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir themselves, there is also variation between individual predicates (verbs) in the ImpC and the NC, and even object types in the NC, e.g. depending on case or whether the object is a full NP or a pronoun.

So instead of analyzing the Canonical Passive and the NC as two fundamentally different constructions, it would seem more plausible to assume that there is some factor involved, be it syntactic or semantic, or possibly both, determining which type of predicate can be passivized, and whether or not an agentive PP, a reflexive, or an adjunct is compatible with the relevant predicate.

It should be stressed here that the thematic null subject hypothesized by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir is by no means required to account for the existence of the NC, nor does an unpromoted internal argument and the absence of a thematic subject conflict with the analysis of the ImpC and the NC as a passive. Assuming with Comrie (1977) that the main function of passive is to ‘demote’ (suppress) the subject (often but not exclusively the agent), a passive analysis can be maintained. On such a view, ‘promotion’ of the direct object would be a secondary function of the passive, being found exclusively with transitive verbs in a particular type of clause (i.e. a clause involving NP-movement). This view of the passive is in accordance with the empirical facts of Icelandic and various other languages, as against the opposite theory according to which promotion of the object is the main function of the passive, while the ImpC-type (especially with unaccusatives) and NC-type constructions are excluded (cf. Perlmutter 1978, Blevins 2003, Burzio 1986). As for the preservation of the accusative in passive, see the discussion in section 6.

On the basis of the evaluation of the criteria used by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir, I conclude that there is not sufficient evidence to show that the NC involves two arguments with monotransitives. Therefore, I assume that only the internal argument is involved and the external argument (the subject) is suppressed.³⁵ In this case it would seem unproblematic to assume that the subject is understood from the context. In other words, the subject is implicit (or ‘dethematized’), and this accounts for the partial conformity with the properties in (51) (cf. Barðdal & Molnár 2003). The

morphological means to form the NC *qua* passive, as other types of passive in Icelandic, involves the passive morphology consisting of the auxiliary *vera* ‘be’ plus the past participle, which only exhibits agreement with a nominative NP, regardless of whether or not it is a subject. Thus, the NC really is a passive in Modern Icelandic (cf. also Kjartansson 1991 and Barðdal & Molnár 2003).

6. Accusative preserved in passive

6.1 Introduction

In the previous section I argued that there is no independent evidence for the assumption of a thematic null impersonal subject in the NC in Icelandic; recall that the expletive *það* ‘it’ is not an argument but a placeholder which is inserted in the absence of another initial element in main and embedded clauses. This means that the NC is a passive with structural accusative case assignment. In this respect, the NC – *qua* the New Passive – is directly comparable to the *-no/to-*construction in Ukrainian and other languages (Sobin 1985, Lavine 2005).³⁶

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir claim that the Icelandic construction does not have a match in other Nordic or Germanic languages. I would now like to point out some parallels to the Icelandic New Passive that have largely gone unnoticed so far. These parallels are found in some of the closest relatives of Icelandic, namely Norwegian (6.2) and Faroese (6.3). In addition, I will highlight the importance of the Icelandic Impersonal Ditransitive Reflexive Construction (IDRC), mentioned in section 2.3 above, in which accusative occurs with the direct object (6.4). Finally, I briefly discuss the theoretical challenge presented by the existence of passive constructions preserving structural case assignment.

6.2 Norwegian

In Norwegian the so-called Impersonal Passive, introduced by the element *det* ‘it’ (or *der* ‘there’), contains an auxiliary ‘be’ and a past participle (Åfarli 1992, Faarlund et al. 1997).³⁷ The associate NP corresponding to the direct object of an active sentence must be postverbal and, as in the canonical *það*-passive in Icelandic, it must normally be indefinite (66a). On the other hand, in the Norwegian construction an NP corresponding to the indirect object follows the participle and may be definite, as seen in (66b). In this respect, the Norwegian Impersonal Passive is similar to the Icelandic New Passive in which a definite indirect object must follow the participle.

- (66) a. Det vart lagt **eit dokument**/*det framfor oss.
 it was placed a document/it before us
 ‘A document/*it was placed before us.’
 b. Det vart overrekt vinnaren **ein pokal**/*pokalen.
 it was given winner.the a cup/cup.the
 ‘The winner was given a cup/*the cup.’

To be sure, exceptions to the DE of the indirect object in the Norwegian construction have been reported, but they mostly involve heavy postverbal NPs, as shown in (67) (cf. Faarlund et al. 1997: 845-847, with further examples and references). However,

such sentences do not belong to the ‘core grammar’ of Norwegian (J.T. Faarlund, D. Haug, p.c.).

- (67) Såvidt vi kan forstå, er det her tatt med **de totale omkostninger**.
 so.far we can understand is it here taken with the total cost
 ‘As far as we can understand, the total cost is included here.’

What is important is that the postverbal NP is standardly argued to be an object, assigned structural accusative case (cf. Hestvik 1986, Åfarli 1992 and Faarlund et al. 1997). Even though there is no overt case morphology on nouns in Norwegian, the postverbal NP in the Impersonal Passive can be shown to exhibit object-like behavior as it does not pass subject tests such as Conjunction Reduction and the possibility of having an agentive PP (Faarlund et al. 1997: 847). Compare in this respect Icelandic, where the postverbal NP in the **canonical** *það*-passive also exhibits object-like characteristics with respect to such subject tests, as discussed in section 2.2.1 above (examples (16b)-(17b)).³⁸

In sum, the Norwegian *det*-passive is a close parallel to the New Passive in Icelandic in that the postverbal argument is an object rather than a subject. Moreover, in Norwegian an NP corresponding to the indirect object of an active ditransitive verb follows the participle and may be definite, just as is the case in the Icelandic New Passive. The main difference is that the direct object NP must generally be indefinite in Norwegian. The reason for this difference between Icelandic and Norwegian remains to be established.

6.3 Faroese

Closer to home, in Faroese some ditransitive verbs, e.g. *ynskja* ‘wish’, that exhibit the DAT-ACC case frame in the active (68a) preserve accusative case with the postverbal NP in the passive (68b).³⁹ On the other hand, the structure with a nominative NP, as in (68c), is apparently not widely accepted in Modern Faroese (cf. Barnes 1986, Thráinsson et al. 2004: 273).⁴⁰

- | | | |
|------|---|---------|
| (68) | a. Tey ynsktu <u>honum</u> eina góða ferð .
they wished.3.PL him.DAT a good trip.ACC
‘They wished him a good journey.’ | Active |
| | b. <u>Honum</u> varð ynskt eina góða ferð .
him.DAT became wished.N.SG a good trip.ACC
‘He was wished a good journey.’ | Passive |
| | c. ? <u>Honum</u> varð ynskt ein góð ferð .
him.DAT became wished.N.SG a good trip.NOM
‘He was wished a good journey.’ | Passive |

Moreover, an existential variant of the Full Passive in (68b) is shown in (69), in which there is an expletive *tað* ‘it’ and a postverbal indefinite NP in the accusative.

- (69) Tað varð ynskt honum **eina góða ferð**.
 it became wished.N.SG him.DAT.SG a good trip.ACC
 ‘People wished him a good journey.’

Further examples are given in (70a-b). The construction is reported to be relatively uncommon and has, to my knowledge, so far not been discussed in the literature. It seems, however, that there is a DE such that definite nouns and pronouns cannot occur postverbally, and therefore (70c) and (70d) are judged ungrammatical; however, nouns can be modified by the demonstrative *hesi* ‘this’, as in (70b).⁴¹

- (70) a. Tað varð lovað henni eina teldu.
it became promised her.DAT a.ACC computer.ACC
‘She was promised a computer.’
- b. Tað varð lovað henni hesa telduna.
it became promised her.DAT this.ACC computer.ACC
‘She was promised this computer.’
- c. *Tað varð lovað henni telduna.
it became promised her.DAT computer.the.ACC
- d. *Tað varð lovað henni hana.
it became promised her.DAT her.ACC

Crucially, the case of the postverbal NP is accusative, which cannot be observed in Norwegian due to the lack of case morphology on nouns in that language. In Faroese, on the other hand, case morphology has been preserved to a large degree. In this connection, it should be noted that an alternative – presumably older – construction in Faroese has a postverbal nominative NP which must be indefinite.

- (71) a. Tað varð lovað henni ein telda.
it became promised her.DAT a.NOM computer.NOM
‘She was promised a computer.’
- b. *Tað varð lovað henni henda teldan.
it became promised her.DAT this.NOM computer.the.NOM

In the relevant examples above, viz. (69), (70a-b) and (71a), the indirect object occurs to the right of the participle and can be definite, which is different from the Canonical Passive in Icelandic. Remarkably, the *tað*-passive with a postverbal accusative NP seems only possible with ditransitives, not with monotransitives.

It is clear that, just as the Impersonal Passive in Norwegian, the Faroese construction under discussion is a parallel to the New Passive in Icelandic. Further work is required to establish the status of this construction in Faroese, in particular the complicated issue regarding the nature of the DE.

The fact that these very similar passive constructions occur in closely related languages, Icelandic, Faroese and Norwegian, raises the question of their origins. Are these phenomena common West-Norse inheritance, or are they due to contact between these languages? Neither possibility seems plausible in this case, and thus I provisionally conclude that the constructions instantiate a parallel structural development in these languages, something which can also be observed in other domains of their grammar.⁴²

6.4 Icelandic: The Impersonal Ditransitive Reflexive Construction

Finally, I briefly discuss the Impersonal Ditransitive Reflexive Construction (IDRC), introduced in section 2.3, which preserves the accusative case with the direct object. Example (35a), given above, is repeated here as (72).

- (72) Það var fengið sér öllara. IDRC
 it was got.N.SG REFL.DAT beer.ACC
 ‘People got themselves a beer.’

As mentioned earlier, although the IDRC is restricted to only a few ditransitive verbs, it seems to be quite widespread in colloquial Icelandic, and to be accepted by speakers for whom the New Passive of verbs taking non-reflexive objects is ungrammatical. Like other reflexive verbs, this type does not have a Canonical Passive pendant. However, just as with passive of reflexives and the New Passive, there is no reason to assume that the IDRC involves a thematic null subject; the fact that a reflexive pronoun occurs in this construction can be attributed to its status as an affix on the verb rather than an object. Thus, the IDRC is a passive construction in which the direct object is assigned (or ‘preserves’) structural accusative case. As in other structures which do not contain a nominative form, there is no participial agreement. The generalization to be derived from the properties of the IDRC is that, in the absence of nominative case, which is the default case in Icelandic *par excellence*, accusative is assigned to an internal argument as the default (or unmarked) structural object case (see Sigurðsson 2007).

6.5 Empirical evidence – theoretical problems

According to the properties in (51), assumed by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir to distinguish passive of impersonal active, the Ukrainian *-no/to-*construction clearly is a passive, as is in particular evident from the fact that it can co-occur with an agentive PP (cf. Sobin 1985, Lavine 2005). The syntactic difference between the Ukrainian canonical passive and the *-no/-to-*construction is minimal, boiling down to assignment of nominative in the former and accusative in the latter.⁴³ By assumption, both constructions involve an implicit (‘dethematized’) subject that can be retrieved from the context (Lavine 2005) and not a thematic null subject. The *-no/to-*construction in Polish, on the other hand, is a much better candidate for a real impersonal construction with a thematic null subject.

The question arises whether the ‘preservation’ of accusative is to be considered a problem for the passive analysis. Within certain influential theories it is commonly assumed that accusative is not preserved in passive – accusative case and passive are supposed to be mutually exclusive. However, this assumption depends on a particular theory-internal definition of passive. For example, Blevins (2003), following Perlmutter (1978) and others, explicitly argues that the Ukrainian *-no/to-*construction is not a passive precisely because he defines passive in such a way that it cannot contain an accusative argument and cannot be formed to unaccusatives. A similar view is inherent in Burzio’s Generalization in generative grammar (Burzio 1986). If passive is defined such that it cannot involve an accusative, then it is clear that constructions containing an NP assigned structural accusative case in Ukrainian, Icelandic, and other languages are not passives. But *a priori* there is no reason to

assume a theory which excludes accusative from passive (for arguments, cf. Áfarli 1992, Collins 2005, Lavine 2005).

The existence of constructions such as the New Passive in Icelandic – a passive with structural accusative case assignment – can provide empirical support for the analysis advanced by Collins (2005), combining aspects of the principles and parameters approach and Chomsky's (1957) claim that the arguments in the passive are generated in the same positions as they are in the active. On this view, the absence of structural accusative case assignment in the Canonical Passive, where there is nominative case instead, and its presence in the New Passive is attributed to parametric variation in the assignment of accusative case assignment. The basic assumption is that there is a case feature [\pm accusative] in a functional head (F) taking a VP complement. The value of this parameter determines the case of the postverbal NP. This proposal, which can only be sketched here very briefly, is in line with the view all parametric variation is localized to variation in uninterpretable features (cf. Collins 2005 with further references). The properties of the New Passive, the passive of reflexives and the Impersonal Ditransitive Reflexive Construction (IDRC) show that, in the absence of nominative case assignment, accusative is assigned to an internal argument. This is in keeping with the assumption, mentioned earlier, that while nominative is the general default (unmarked) case in Icelandic, accusative is the default structural object case and can be assigned to an internal argument in passive if nominative case assignment fails to occur.

6.6 Summary

The NC in Icelandic really is a passive and not an impersonal active **despite** the accusative case marking. In this respect, the NC in Icelandic is comparable to the *-no/to*-construction in Ukrainian (and not the Polish one, as claimed by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir). Further parallels to the NC, so far unnoticed, are found in languages closely related to Icelandic, namely Faroese and Norwegian. Finally, the Icelandic Impersonal Ditransitive Reflexive Construction can be captured on the assumption that, in the absence of nominative case assignment, accusative figures as the default structural object case in passive.

7. How did the change happen?

7.1 Introduction

The previous discussion has shown that the alleged arguments for an impersonal active construction are not persuasive. Given the crosslinguistic evidence that accusative case is compatible with passive (*pace* Burzio's Generalization), I proposed that the NC should indeed be analyzed as a passive – and hence the label New Passive should be used for this construction.

Thus, the difference between Canonical Passive and the New Passive is minimal, as is *a priori* suggested by the fact that there does not seem to be any fundamental semantic difference between the two constructions. As discussed in section 6.5 above, a way of accounting for this minimal difference in morphosyntactic terms is to attribute it to a parametric variation in a case feature [\pm accusative] determining the case of the postverbal NP.

The question arises what the source of this parametric variation is. We have seen that there are parallels in other Scandinavian languages, in particular in Faroese and Norwegian. However, there is no evidence that the origins of the New Passive in Icelandic was due to contact with any other language. Therefore, the New Passive must be considered a ‘home-grown’ innovation in Icelandic.

The first step in pinpointing the emergence of the New Passive of the Canonical Passive is to look for an ‘area of contact’ between the two constructions. We have seen that there is a morphological overlap, a structural ambiguity, between the New Passive and the canonical existential passive with a postverbal NP in neuter singulars and in NPs that have oblique case (dative, genitive). The NP in the existential passive is generally subject to the DE, although there are instances of a ‘leakage’ where the postverbal NP is definite.

By assumption, then, the structural ambiguity and the ‘leakage’ in the DE can lead to reanalysis of the canonical existential passive with a postverbal NP as the New Passive. There are good reasons to believe that this reanalysis is intimately linked to first language acquisition. The New Passive is common among children and adolescents, but among adults it seems largely to give way to the Canonical Passive. As Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir show, speakers for whom the New Passive is grammatical generally also accept the Canonical Passive; both to judge by their survey and impressionistically, there do not seem to be any speakers who only have the New Passive. This suggests that the diffusion of the innovation has not been completed with any speaker of Icelandic. The existence of two passive constructions raises the question whether there are two (competing) grammars in the same speaker, or variation in one grammar. Detailed surveys must be carried out before this question can be answered satisfactorily.⁴⁴

7.2 The emergence of the New Passive: A proposal

Given these background assumptions, an account of the emergence of the New Passive in Icelandic can be sketched as follows.⁴⁵ The point of departure is the claim in Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (p. 112) that the NC began with dative forms because it appears more common with verbs taking dative objects than with those taking accusative objects; this claim is consistent with the observations for Ukrainian and Polish, ‘that the change began with those forms where the morphological evidence of nonagreement is least obvious’ (cf. also Maling 2006). In fact, postverbal oblique NPs (datives and genitives) and, moreover, neuter singular NPs involve a formal ambiguity between the New Passive and the canonical *það*-passive, as shown in (73). Furthermore, the postverbal NP in the canonical *það*-passive is arguably object-like, at least for some speakers, and so the preconditions for a change from nominative to accusative (the default structural object case) may already have been latent for a considerable period.

- | | | |
|------|---|------------|
| (73) | a. Það var skammað lítið barn.
it was scolded.N.SG little.NOM/ACC child.NOM/ACC
‘A little child was scolded.’ | CanPass/NC |
| | b. Það var hrint litlum stráki.
it was pushed.N.SG little.DAT boy.DAT
‘A little boy was pushed.’ | CanPass/NC |

The ambiguity is even more robust in cases of the above-mentioned ‘leakage’ in the DE with postverbal NPs, which is of course an exceptional pattern in the Canonical Passive.

- (74) a. Það var skammað litla barnið. NC (CanPass)
 it was scolded.N.SG little.DEF.NOM/ACC child.the.NOM/ACC
 ‘The little child was scolded.’
 b. Það var hrint litla stráknunum. NC (CanPass)
 it was pushed little.DEF.DAT boy.the.DAT
 ‘The little boy was pushed.’

In order for structures with postverbal NPs to signal to the acquirer that the construction in question is the canonical existential passive, either or both of the following two conditions on the postverbal NP must be met: (i) the NP must be unambiguously nominative, and/or (ii) it must be indefinite. In case of a formal ambiguity in morphological case forms and a ‘leakage’ in the DE a reanalysis of the postverbal NP can take place. Due to this reanalysis, the postverbal NP in ‘object position’ is assigned structural object case – accusative – rather than nominative case.

The question that immediately comes up is: Why did this change happen in Icelandic when it did and not at some other time? This is the ‘actuation problem’, and it cannot be given an answer at present. The fact remains that there do not seem to be any unambiguous examples of the New Passive containing either full NPs in the accusative or pronouns until the mid-20th century (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir, p. 129).

For the purposes of this paper, I would like to concentrate on a plausible scenario for the emergence of the New Passive rather than stating the exact conditions on the actuation of the change. The basic assumption here is that the absence of structural accusative case in the Canonical Passive and its presence in the New Passive is attributable to parametric variation in a case feature [\pm accusative] in a functional head (F) taking a VP complement, which determines the case of the postverbal NP (cf. Collins 2005).

As we have seen, there is ample comparative evidence for this assumption, involving the preservation of accusative case in passive in languages such as Ukrainian. Moreover, the change from nominative to accusative case assignment with objects in original DAT-NOM constructions in Faroese and Middle English would seem to provide further supporting evidence for the assumption (see above, 6.3). The premise is that nominative is the default structural case *par excellence*, but accusative is the default structural object case. Thus, if nominative is not assigned to the external argument, it can be assigned to the internal argument. This is the reason for nominative case assignment to the internal argument in the Canonical Passive to transitive verbs, where there is no external argument, and in DAT-NOM structures, where the external argument is not assigned nominative. However, if the evidence for nominative is somehow weakened, for example as a result of shifts in the input available to the acquirer, accusative can be assigned to the internal argument instead; hence the accusative case assignment in the New Passive of Icelandic and comparable constructions and the DAT-ACC structures in Faroese and Middle English.

So on the account developed here, a child faced with ambiguous evidence regarding the morphological case of the postverbal NP would conclude that the structural case of the NP in object position should be accusative and not nominative. The ambiguous structures give rise to a resetting of the case parameter in favor of accusative case –

the default structural case with objects. Once the postverbal NP has been reanalyzed as an object that is assigned structural accusative case, the New Passive emerges:

- (75) Það var barið lítinn strákur. NC
 it was beaten.N.SG little.ACC boy.ACC
 ‘A little boy was beaten.’

Presumably, the reanalysis takes place as a result of a drop in the frequency of the evidence that the acquirers have for nominative case with the postverbal NP below a certain threshold which remains to be specified. However, this is about as precise as we can be about this matter at this point (for some general speculations, see Lightfoot 1999, 2006). The statistics relating to type and token frequency of nominative vs. oblique case with (postverbal) NPs in the Canonical Passive remain to be established.

As the New Passive does not involve nominative case assignment to the object, the absence of participial agreement in favor of the default neuter singular form is an inevitable part and parcel of the change. Recall that the assumption is that the New Passive emerges in structures where the participial agreement could be interpreted as ‘defective’. It is reasonable to assume that this reanalysis is favored by lack of agreement in other types of passive: the impersonal passive of intransitives, including reflexives and unaccusatives (see examples in section 3). In all of these structures the participle is in the default neuter singular form. Since the postverbal NP is assigned accusative rather than nominative there is no agreement with the past participle.

Moreover, in this case no NP-movement (A-movement) can occur, neither long nor short, since the movement of objects is only to A’-positions.⁴⁶

- (76) *Það var lítinn strákur barið.
 it was little.ACC boy.ACC beaten.N.SG

Finally, since the NP is not a subject but an object, the DE no longer applies. As a result, the following structures are possible in the New Passive:

- (77) a. Það var barið litla strákurinn. NC
 it was beaten.N.SG little.DEF.ACC boy.the.ACC
 ‘The little boy was beaten.’
 b. Það var hrint litla stráknú. NC
 it was pushed.N.SG little.DEF.DAT boy.the.DAT
 ‘The little boy was pushed.’

In conclusion, the main motivation for the emergence of the New Passive can be identified. Due to instances of formal and structural ambiguity, the postverbal NP is reanalyzed as an object which is assigned structural accusative case rather than nominative. This change amounts to a resetting of the case parameter in favor of the accusative. The other properties of the New Passive, i.e. the lack of NP movement and the DE, follow from this reanalysis.

A further reason favoring the New Passive over the Canonical Passive is comprehensible on the view that the main function of passive is demotion (suppression) of the external argument rather than the promotion of the internal argument (NP-movement); cf. Comrie (1977) and the discussion in 5.6 above. This view implies that since promotion is a ‘secondary’ function of the passive, it can be dispensed with, while the grammatical function of passive is preserved.

Finally, it should be stressed that passivization as an ‘impersonalizing’ device is ubiquitous in Icelandic, whereas ‘man’-impersonals are constrained compared to related languages (cf. Jónsson 1992, Ragnarsdóttir & Strömquist 2005 for a comparison of Icelandic and Swedish). In Icelandic the indefinite pronoun *maður* ‘one’, homonymous with the noun meaning ‘man’, only has a specific/inclusive meaning in that it must include the speaker (first person singular). It does not have a generic or an arbitrary meaning excluding the speaker (‘people (in general)’). The restrictions on the use of the indefinite *maður* must be seen in relation to the proliferation of constructions with passive morphology in Icelandic.

7.3. Alternative views

The account just sketched of the origins of the New Passive differs from those proposed by previous researchers: Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002), Kjartansson (1991) and Barðdal & Molnár (2003).

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (p. 101) argue that the NC is due to a reanalysis of the passive of intransitive verbs (‘impersonal passive’) as an impersonal active containing a thematic null subject, and spread to transitives via the Impersonal Construction (ImpC) with reflexives (‘reflexive passive’). Based on their study of the NC in Icelandic, they propose that the first stage after the reanalysis was the extension of the impersonal passive to inherently reflexive predicates; this then was extended to non-inherent reflexives and other bound anaphors (p. 122, p. 133).

As discussed in section 3, in Icelandic an impersonal passive can be formed to reflexive verbs, both inherent reflexives and optional reflexives, as in (43) (from Sigurðsson 1989: 355, fn. 60), repeated here as (78). In this case there is no participial agreement, as is expected since there is no argument that is assigned nominative case.

- | | | |
|------|--|------|
| (78) | a. Það var leikið sér allan daginn.
it was played.N.SG REFL.DAT all day
‘People played all day.’ | ImpC |
| | b. Það var baðað sig á laugardögum.
it was bathed.N.SG REFL.ACC on Saturdays
‘People took a bath on Saturdays.’ | ImpC |

Moreover, as shown in section 5.5.2, the acceptance rate for the ‘ImpC’ is much higher for sentences with a reflexive object than with a non-reflexive accusative object (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002: 122). It is therefore a reasonable assumption that the reflexive passive is older, or at least gained ground more rapidly, than the New Passive.

However, serious objections can be raised against the proposal of Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir; these objections are of two kinds:

On the one hand, as argued at length above, the basic hypothesis that the NC is an impersonal active (the IAH) is not supported by valid evidence; hence it is inevitable that their further hypothesis about the origins of this construction is compromised. On the other hand, there are some specific problems with the latter hypothesis itself. Thus, the hypothesis requires an unmotivated reanalysis of a passive construction as an active retaining passive morphology, as Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir admit themselves (p. 133). They seek to relate this reanalysis to the fact that in Icelandic, unlike the mainland Scandinavian languages, passive is restricted to [+human] agents.

In other words, they claim that because of the [+human] restriction in Icelandic, passive of intransitive verbs is reanalyzed as an active. However, given that the [+human] restriction also holds of the Full Passive in Icelandic, the question arises why the Full Passive in Icelandic has not been reanalyzed as an active.

Furthermore, Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir claim (p. 134) that constructions in the standard language such as the IMC (79a) (M/S 46) and infinitive constructions containing uncontrolled unexpressed subjects (PRO-arb) (79b) (cf. M/S 48b) serve as models for the reanalysis of the impersonal passive as a syntactically active impersonal construction.

- (79) a. Það verður að kjósa hana. IMC
 it becomes to elect her.ACC
 ‘She must be elected.’
 b. Það var verið að gefa mér lýsi. PRO-arb
 it was been to give me.DAT cod.liver.oil.ACC
 ‘I was being given cod liver oil.’

However, the IMC is an active construction, in which the unexpressed subject (*pro*) can be replaced by overt NP, as shown in (49) above. This is impossible in the NC/New Passive. Moreover, PRO-infinitival clauses involve non-finite verbs in the active, and do not of course contain a thematic null subject. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that these constructions could have been instrumental in the change proposed by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir.

Finally, as to the claim that the NC spread from its alleged original locus in the ImpC of intransitive verbs to transitives via reflexives, it should be pointed out that the ImpC with reflexives (‘reflexive passive’) is rather marginal and is hardly robust enough to be a model for the NC transitives. More importantly, as reflexive verbs are plausibly analyzed as unergatives, the plain reflexive being an affix rather than an object of the verb, it is by no means clear that the reflexive would have been a model for arguments of transitive verbs.

The remaining potential argument for the IAH would be the occurrence of accusative. As we have seen, however, the force of this argument is weak given the crosslinguistic evidence for the compatibility of accusative with passive.

So in light of this critique the hypothesis proposed by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir on the origins of the NC/New Passive cannot be accepted. A different proposal is found in Kjartansson (1991) and Barðdal and Molnár (2003), although it also seeks the origins of the New Passive in the passive of intransitive verbs. Taking for granted that the New Passive really is a passive, these scholars claim that its origins are to be sought in unergatives taking a PP complement, as in (80a). Specifically, Barðdal and Molnár (2003: 245) propose that the new construction arose via reanalysis of the preposition as a particle so that the structural object case came to be assigned by the verb (rather than the preposition/particle). Presumably, then, this pattern would have been subsequently generalized to transitive verbs.

- (80) a. Það var leikið á mig. CanPass
 it was tricked.N.SG on me.ACC
 ‘I was tricked.’
 b. Það var platað mig. NC
 it was tricked.N.SG me.ACC
 ‘I was tricked.’

However, it must be asked whether it is really plausible to assume that the development of the New Passive involved an extension from the argument structure of a preposition to the argument structure of a verb so that it is preserved in passive. The analysis is theoretically problematic and, as far as I can see, there would be no empirical evidence in Icelandic to back it up.

In sum, the accounts of the historical origins of the New Passive proposed by Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir (2002), Kjartansson (1991) and Barðdal & Molnár (2003) are problematic for various reasons and cannot be accepted.

8. Conclusion

In this paper I have examined the arguments which have been brought forth for the status of the New Construction (NC) in Icelandic. I showed that these arguments do not favor an analysis of the NC as an impersonal active, along the lines of Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir (2002). I examined the status of the construction on the basis of the criteria used by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir to distinguish the properties of impersonal active constructions from passive. While accepting their arguments that the postverbal NP in the NC is an object, I concluded that the construction really is a passive despite the accusative case marking of the postverbal NP, in breach of Burzio's Generalization. Thus, the NC *qua* New Passive is – *mutatis mutandis* – comparable to the *-no/to*-construction in Ukrainian, a passive preserving structural accusative case assignment. Moreover, I pointed out some parallels in languages closely related to Icelandic, in particular in Norwegian and Faroese. These parallels involve a postverbal NP which exhibits object-like characteristics, and have so far not figured in the literature on the Icelandic construction; they show that the New Passive is not an isolated case in Scandinavian, although it is plausible that it emerged independently in Icelandic, Faroese and Norwegian. Finally, I proposed a scenario of the innovation that gave rise to the New Passive in Icelandic. I argued that the construction resulted from a reanalysis of the existential variant of the Canonical Passive without NP-movement. The locus for the reanalysis involves cases that are formally and structurally ambiguous, i.e. cases where the canonical existential passive without NP-movement and the New Passive cannot be distinguished morphologically. Attributing the minimal difference between the New Passive and the Canonical Passive to a parametric variation in a case feature [\pm accusative] (cf. Collins 2005), I argued that the ambiguous structures give rise to a resetting of the case parameter in favor of accusative case assignment. The alternative views by Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir (2002), Kjartansson (1991) and Barðdal & Molnár (2003), seeking the origins of the New Constructions in the passive of intransitive verbs ('impersonal passive'), were critiqued and rejected.

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Notes

¹ For convenience most examples of the NC (and the canonical existential passive) in this paper contain sentences with an initial *það* 'it', which can occur either in main or embedded clauses, but it is absent in topicalizations, *wh*-questions and verb-initial clauses, e.g. yes/no questions. The use of passive in the English translation of the Icelandic NC does not necessarily indicate a commitment to a particular analysis of the syntactic status of the construction. – It should be noted that the NC is generally ungrammatical for the present writer, although there is a certain amount of gradience in its acceptability.

² 'Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir' refers to the 2002 article by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir, which is the point of reference here. Most of the examples of the NC in this paper are taken from or based on this article. Other examples have been collected by the present author, often via the Internet or Icelandic media. – A large survey is currently underway at the University of Iceland, focusing among other things on the NC (Variation in Syntax; Prof. Höskuldur Thráinsson, Principal Investigator). The results of that survey could not be taken systematically into account here.

³ As discussed further below, there are certain exceptions to the DE with postverbal NPs, but not with the preverbal ones.

⁴ Note that (7b) and (8b) are ambiguous as they could also be instances of Full Passive, but this is irrelevant for the present purposes. The placement of sentential adverbs could disambiguate the two constructions in these cases.

⁵ I make the standard assumption that the oblique NPs with lexical case (dative or genitive) are assigned abstract 'Case', unrelated to morphological case marking (see Sigurðsson 2007).

⁶ It is important to note that in active *það*-sentences there is no effect of this kind.

⁷ Recall that for convenience most examples of the NC in this paper contain sentences with an initial *það* 'it'. The initial element can also be a topic or a *wh*-phrase, or a finite verb.

⁸ Guðmundsdóttir (2002) speculates that the NC involves the loss of the DE. However, it is not the case that speakers who accept the NC lack the DE in other constructions, as pointed out by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (p. 100).

⁹ Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir's study (p. 112) indicates the NC is more common with verbs taking dative objects than with those taking accusative objects. However, this result was not obtained on the basis of comparison of minimal pairs involving verbs that take accusative or dative.

¹⁰ *Sagan af Tuma litla* (Tom Sawyer) by Mark Twain (an anonymous Icelandic translation), Reykjavík 1944, 131.

¹¹ The examples from Old Icelandic were found by searching the Text Corpus of the University of Iceland Dictionary Project: <http://www.lexis.hi.is/corpus/leit.pl>. (26a-be) is from *Grettis Saga* and (26c) from *Sturlunga Saga*. Further examples have been provided by Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson (p.c.).

¹² Notice that the expletive *það* ‘it’ did not occur in Old Icelandic, so that the passive auxiliary would either be preceded by some other element, as in (26a-b), or be clause-initial, as in (26c).

¹³ Old Icelandic had both VO and OV orders in the VP, and therefore the NP might precede the participle but still be in object position.

¹⁴ Such clauses are rather like the transitive expletive construction in which the subject must not occur within the VP (to the right of the past participle).

- (i) a. *Það höfðu sennilega einhverjir stúdentar lesið þessa bók.*
 it has probably some students read this book
 ‘Some students had probably read this book.’
 b. *??Það höfðu sennilega lesið einhverjir stúdentar þessa bók.*
 it has probably read some students this book

¹⁵ ‘M/S’ will henceforth be used as an abbreviation for the examples in Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir (2002).

¹⁶ This example involves an innovative case pattern with *spryja* ‘ask’, substituting accusative case with the object for the original genitive case; this is common in colloquial Icelandic, especially among younger people. Thanks to Helgi Skúli Kjartansson for providing more examples from Icelandic webpages on varying case patterns with this verb.

¹⁷ The examples in (35) were modified after sentences found on Icelandic websites. The translations of the examples are only approximate and do not necessarily say anything about the precise syntactic status of the construction.

¹⁸ However, when these verbs take non-reflexive indirect objects they can be passivized.

¹⁹ Preliminary investigation suggests that there is an implicational hierarchy such that speakers who accept the NC also accept the IDRC and impersonal constructions with passive morphology, including intransitives (‘impersonal passive’) and reflexives, whereas the converse does not hold (cf. Árnadóttir 2006).

²⁰ The label ‘Prepositional Passive’ used in Barðdal and Molnár (2003) is misleading given that objects of prepositions cannot be passivized in Icelandic as in English, for example (cf. Maling and Zaenen 1985). The type in (39) is subsumed under ‘quasi-impersonal passive’ by Ottósson (1989:39-40).

²¹ As mentioned in 2.2.2, there are sporadic earlier examples, even from Old Icelandic, that look like the NC. However, there are to my knowledge no examples with an accusative, so these cases do not unambiguously involve the NC.

²² Comparable social factors relating to the distribution of ‘Dative Sickness’ were established by Jónsson and Eythórssón (2005).

²³ The preliminary results of the project Syntactic Variation conducted by Prof. Höskuldur Thráinsson and colleagues at the University of Iceland confirm this view.

²⁴ As far as I can see, the reasons for this condition on the NC are nowhere explicitly stated by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir.

²⁵ However, the results were not equally clear in all cases, in particular (M/S 24d), involving a 2nd person pronoun, which got a relatively high acceptance rate among the adolescents.

²⁶ It might be objected that *vera* ‘be’ + past participle does not uniquely involve a passive morphology but can also be found in an active construction. However, here *vera* is arguably not an auxiliary but a copula and the participle is adjectival (Sigurðsson 1989: 331).

²⁷ For example, it is not clear that the NP *must* be animate although most of the examples in Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir are. Some preliminary research indicates that the NC and other *það*-constructions involve defocusing of the postverbal NP, placing the focus on the verbal action instead. Further investigation is required to establish this, however. See Thráinsson (2007: 321-322) for a survey of the interrelation of the syntax and semantics of pre- and postverbal NPs in *það*-constructions.

²⁸ Thanks to Henning Andersen for correction of some of the Ukrainian examples.

²⁹ Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (p. 105) respond to the problem of accusative case with the object by assuming ‘that the verb can assign accusative case to the object because nominative case is assigned to a null expletive subject.’ This assumption does not capture the various other differences between Ukrainian and Polish, however

³⁰ However, this example should hardly be given a star as in Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (p. 120, fn. 10) citing Höskuldur Thráinsson (p.c.).

³¹ The example (M/S 30d) contains an unaccusative verb so it does not unambiguously involve the NC.

³² It is generally doubtful that depictives like these adjuncts are good subject tests. As John Whitman (p.c.) reminds me, they can, for example, be anteceded by the agent in English passives, e.g. *The drinks were quaffed by the cops laughing*.

³³ This is not correct; at least ‘come’ and ‘go’ occur in passive in various Germanic languages, including Swedish (C. Platzack, p.c.), Afrikaans (T. Biberauer, p.c.) and – as shown in this paper – in Old and Modern (standard) Icelandic.

³⁴ In German, for example, there are occasional occurrences of a passive of *sterben* ‘die’.

³⁵ There are of course two arguments involved in the NC from ditransitive verbs, but both are internal.

³⁶ Passive constructions preserving accusative case have been argued to occur in various languages, including Finnish (Manninen and Nelson 2004), Korean and Japanese (John Whitman, p.c.), and Old Irish (Pedersen 1913:394-400). The Modern Irish ‘autonomous’ construction that has developed from the Old Irish passive has been analyzed as an impersonal active rather than a passive (Stenson 1989, Noonan 1994).

³⁷ Neo-Norwegian shows participial agreement either with the expletive *det* ‘it’ or the postverbal NP (see, e.g., Christensen & Taraldsen 1989).

³⁸ Similar conditions also hold of *there*-insertion in English.

³⁹ The Faroese examples involve the passive auxiliary *verða* ‘become’. Another passive auxiliary in Faroese is *blíva* ‘become’, which is more common in the spoken language (Thráinsson et al. 2004: 265).

⁴⁰ On the basis of Old and Modern Icelandic it can be assumed that this construction used to take the DAT-GEN case frame in Old Faroese, which was then replaced by DAT-NOM. In Modern Faroese, however, there has been a further change from a DAT-NOM frame to DAT-ACC. It may be noted that a parallel development occurred in Middle English (cf. Allen 1995: 237-240).

⁴¹ Thanks to Helena á Løgmansbø and Victoria Absalonsen for providing these examples and judgements.

⁴² Faarlund (2000) argues that the postverbal NP, presumably a subject in Old Norse, was reanalyzed in Norwegian as an object because it was in object position. According to Faarlund, the loss of case marking was an important factor in this development in Norwegian, but it is clearly not a necessary condition, assuming that the NC in Icelandic is a parallel development.

⁴³ However, various pragmatic differences between the two constructions have been reported in the literature (see, e.g., Lavine 2000).

⁴⁴ Actually, such surveys are currently underway within the project Syntactic Variation at the University of Iceland.

⁴⁵ The present account develops further the ideas in Eythórsson (2005), although the details are different.

⁴⁶ Lavine (2005) speculates that the Ukrainian *-no/to*-construction involves NP-movement (A-movement). However, the arguments that this fronting is actually A-movement do not appear persuasive.