AG 12: *Comparative Germanic Syntax and the Challenge from Icelandic*

Organizers: Thórhallur Eythórsson & Hans-Martin Gärtner

Programm

Donnerstag 24. Februar 2011

9.00-9.30   Thórhallur Eythórsson (Reykjavík)

Challenging the Challenge: Case in Faroese and Icelandic

9.30-10.00   Jóhannes Gísli Jónsson (Reykjavík)

Dative vs. Accusative Objects in Icelandic

10.00-10.30 Jóhanna Barðdal (Bergen)

Alternating Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat Verbs in a Germanic Context

10.30-11.00 Joan Maling (Brandeis), Anthony Kroch (UPenn) & Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir (Reykjavík)

The Icelandic Challenge: A System-Internal Syntactic Change

11.30.-12.00 Jim Wood (New York):

The Unintentional Causer in Icelandic

12.00.-12.30 Øystein Alexander Vangsnes (Tromsø)

Rolling Up the North Germanic Noun Phrase

12.30.-13.00 Nicole Dehé (Konstanz) [invited speaker]

Aspects of Icelandic Sentence Prosody and the Syntax-Prosody Interface

Freitag 25. Februar 2011

11.30-12.00   Ásgrímur Angantýsson (Reykjavík) [invited speaker]

The Morpho-Syntax of Verb/Adverb Placement and Fronting in Embedded Clauses
in Icelandic and Related Languages

12.00.-12.30 Piotr Garbacz (Oslo)

The Split IP Parameter and the Swedish dialects of Ovansiljan

12.30-13.00   Höskuldur Thráinsson (Reykjavík)

Icelandic A, B, C, D … ? Or: How Long is the Icelandic Alphabet?

13.00-13.30   Svetlana Petrova (Berlin):

Embedded V2 in Middle Low German

13.30-14.00 Hans-Martin Gärtner (Berlin)

Medium-Distance Anaphora

Alternates:

Sabine Häusler (Halle): *Subordinators in (Old)Icelandic*

Alexander Pfaff (Tromsø): *Position Matters, not Form!*

Thórhallur Eythórsson (Reykjavík)

Challenging the Challenge: Case in Faroese and Icelandic

The focus of this paper is on some changes that have taken place in the case system of Faroese, in comparison with Icelandic on the one hand and Mainland Scandinavian on the other hand. Among these changes is the emergence of an impersonal construction reminiscent of the so-called New Passive in Icelandic, in which accusative case is preserved (e.g. *Það var barið mig* 'It was hit me'). This construction has limited distribution in Faroese and seems to occur with only a few verbs, in particular with ditransitives (e.g. *Tað bleiv givið gentuni telduna* 'It was given the girl the computer'). I will back up my claims with results from extensive surveys which were conducted in the Faroe Islands in 2008-10. It will be shown that the changes in Faroese can be regarded as a testing ground for – and a challenge to – hypotheses which have been made on the basis of Icelandic and related languages.

Jóhannes Gísli Jónsson (Reykjavík)

Dative vs. Accusative Objects in Icelandic

Icelandic is unique among Germanic languages in having a large class of two-place verbs taking dative objects. This suggests a high degree of semantic regularity behind dative objects. Still, semantic generalizations about them are hard to come by, the best effort to date being by Svenonius (2002).

Here I focus on a narrowly defined data set, namely, verbs describing how a ball is put in motion, such as *slá* 'hit' (*Green sló boltann / boltanum yfir markið*; 'Green punched the.ball-ACC / -DAT over the.goal'). Such examples are at odds with Svenonius (2002), who requires Icelandic dative objects to be licensed by verbs denoting two subevents not overlapping temporally. This incorrectly rules out accusative with verbs like *slá* and *negla*. The subevents here are clearly temporally distinguishable, and thus only dative would be expected.

In my view, the dual status of the verbs wrt event decomposition is at issue. Since the first subevent involves the agent making forceful contact with an entity whereas the second one involves movement of the entity denoted by the object, the verbs in question can be construed as verbs of contact (> accusative) or (ballistic) motion (> dative). Used as pure contact verb, *slá* cannot take a dative object (* *María sló mér*). Taken together, the data suggest that the crucial factor is the status of the object as undergoing movement or being an affected participant. This also fits well with the traditional view that verbs taking dative objects tend to be low in semantic transitivity.

Jóhanna Barðdal (Bergen)

Alternating Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat Verbs in a Germanic Context

One of the peculiarities of Icelandic syntax is the existence of the so-called *alternating predicates*, i.e. predicates where the arguments of the argument structure seem to "swap" places with each other, not always with any apparent change in meaning (cf. Barðdal 2001, Eythórsson & Barðdal 2005, Barðdal 2006). These predicates are thus different from other canonically and non-canonically case-marked predicates in Icelandic in that they show up with two default word orders, both equally "neutral." An investigation of the syntactic behavior of the two arguments reveals that either argument, i.e. the nominative stimulus and the dative experiencer, behaves syntactically as a subject with regard to a number of subject tests in Icelandic. However, there is little consensus on how to analyze such predicates theoretically, i.e. how to implement this behavior into theoretical models of grammar (cf. Barðdal 2001).

  Alternating predicates of this type have been observed in a number of other Germanic languages, like Faroese (Barnes 1986), Old and Middle English (Allen 1995), the history of the Mainland Scandinavian languages (Barðdal 1998), and their apposite existence in German has also been suggested in passing (Eythórsson & Barðdal 2005). This talk further explores that hypothesis for the German language, it compares the behavior of alternating predicates in Icelandic and German, thus placing German, in this respect, in a proper Germanic context.

Joan Maling (Brandeis), Anthony Kroch (UPenn), Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir (Reykjavík)

The Icelandic Challenge: A System-Internal Syntactic Change

Icelandic is developing the new syntactic construction (NC) in (1); compare the standard passive in (2).

(1) a. _Það var beðið mig að vaska upp._
itEXPL was asked me-ACC to wash up
'I was asked to do the dishes.'

   b. _Það var hrint stráknum._
itEXPL was pushed-neut.sg the.boy-DAT
'The boy was pushed.'

(2) a. _Ég var beðinn að vaska upp_
I-NOM was asked-masc.sg. to wash up

   b. _Stráknum var hrint._
the boy-DAT was pushed-neut.sg.

The most salient characteristic of the NC is that an accusative object in the active voice continues to be marked accusative. The proper analysis of this construction has been the subject of lively debate in recent years, but there is no disagreement about the fact that a major syntactic innovation is taking place. This system-internal change is not the result of borrowing, nor is it the result of any phonological change or morphological weakening. What features of Icelandic make this change possible? Eythórsson (2008:189) observed that reflexive impersonal passive verbs were not found in Old Icelandic, but are an innovation of Modern Icelandic. We argue that Icelandic speakers are prone to reanalyze the reflexive passive as the NC instead of as an incorporated form of the reflexive object. Data collected in two nation-wide surveys show that speakers who accept the NC also accept reflexive impersonal passives, but not vice versa; many adult speakers accept reflexive impersonal passives but do not accept the NC. This data also shows that other effects on the acceptability of the NC, like definiteness and volitional control/agentivity, are compatible with our proposed account.

Jim Wood (New York)

The Unintentional Causer in Icelandic

Many languages with a morphologically distinct dative case allow dative DPs to be added to change-of-state unaccusatives, with the interpretation that the dative argument unintentionally caused the change-of-state event (German, Romanian, etc.). However, despite having a notoriously productive dative case, Icelandic cannot express an unintentional causer with a 'free dative' in change-of-state unaccusatives. Rather, a preposition (*hjá*) is used. In the context of the applicative theory of non-obligatory arguments, I propose that Icelandic differs not in lacking the Appl which introduces German-type unintentional causer, but rather in being unable to license a dative DP there. This analysis is supported first by the fact that dative unintentional causers exhibit a cluster of distinct properties cross-linguistically, which are shared by Icelandic *hjá* PPs with change-of-state events. Second, there are a number of other constructions where a *hjá* PP does alternate with a dative DP with the same thematic role in both cases (e.g. **mér.DAT** *tókst þetta* / *þetta tókst* **hjá mér** 'I managed to succeed at this'). This shows that *hjá* is capable, in some cases, of assigning whatever θ-role the corresponding applicative would assign to a dative. Moreover, when an overt dative appears, *hjá* can no longer assign this role to its DP, but must take a different (locative) interpretation. From my perspective, this is akin to the impossibility of expressing a nominative agent and a *by*-phrase simultaneously (e.g. #*John hit Susan by a car*).

Øystein Alexander Vangsnes (Tromsø)

Rolling Up the North Germanic Noun Phrase

Icelandic regular definite DPs with a numeral show a significant word order difference when compared to other DP types: the string A–N(-DEF)–POSS must precede the numeral in regular definite DPs (1) but follow it in demonstrative and indefinite noun phrases (2).

(1) a. *frægu bækur-nar mínar fjórar*   (2) a. *þessar fjórar frægu bækur   mínar*
       famous books-DEF my   four   these   four   famous books-DEF my
    b. * *frægu bækur-nar fjórar mínar*   b. * *þessar frægu bækur mínar fjórar*
    c. * *frægu bækur mínar-nar fjórar*   c. * *frægu bækur mínar þessar fjórar*

Importantly, neither non-pronominal possessors (i.e. genitives) nor complement PPs shift "along" with the N+DEF past numerals, unlike adjectives and possessives. In other varieties of Germanic, the numeral will be in the same position across all DP types.
  In this paper we will analyze the Icelandic facts as an effect of DP internal XP movement of the string A–N-DEF to the left of numerals in the relevant cases. We will assume the extended projection of N in (3).

(3) $[KP* \ [DP \ [CardP \ [Gen^2P \ [Gen^1P \ [P^2P \ [P^1P \ [\alpha P* \ [n^2P \ [n^1P \ [DxP \ [WP \ [NP$

In this structure the definite affix is merged in DxP, adjectives in αP, possessors in GenP, and numerals in CardP, and the surface structures result from lower parts successively rolling up from the bottom in principled ways.

Nicole Dehé (Konstanz) [invited speaker]

Aspects of Icelandic Sentence Prosody and the Syntax-Prosody Interface

Despite a few recent additions to the literature on Icelandic prosody/intonation, Icelandic has not yet been the topic of much research in this area and neither has the relation between syntactic and prosodic phrasing been explored. For example, to the best of my knowledge, the syntactic constraints on prosodic phrasing as suggested in much recent literature (i.e., constraints of the Align, Wrap and Match families suggested, e.g., in Selkirk's and Truckenbrodt's work) have not been systematically tested for Icelandic. The same holds for size constraints and other constraints on phrasing. Similarly, many aspects of the intonation of Icelandic have yet to be studied.

  In this talk, I will give a brief overview of what is known about Icelandic sentence prosody and the prosody of focus in Icelandic; for example:

(i) intonational phrasing is reflected in tonal (edge tones, accent types/position)
     as well as segmental (elision) cues;
(ii) focus receives main stress, but post-focal given material is not necessarily deaccented;
(iii) focus affects prosodic phrasing but AlignFoc does not apply;
(iv) final lengthening might not be a reliable cue to a phrase boundary in Icelandic.

The prosodic properties will be related to syntactic research questions where possible. I hope that the discussion will lead to new insights into the syntax-prosody interface.

Ásgrímur Angantýsson (Reykjavík) [invited speaker]

The Morpho-Syntax of Verb/Adverb Placement and Fronting in Embedded Clauses

in Icelandic and Related Languages

The main concern in this paper is the status of Icelandic among the Scandinavian languages, from a morpho-syntactic perspective. Icelandic is known for its robust inflectional system and syntactic characteristics such as subject-verb agreement, non-nominative subjects, Stylistic Fronting and Vfin-Adv order in all types of subject-initial embedded clauses, while the Mainland Scandinavian languages typically lack these properties. In a simplified picture, Faroese, and perhaps Övdalian, can be viewed as standing midway between the two poles. In the literature on Scandinavian syntax, a central idea has been that morpho-syntactic variables of this kind are parametrically interrelated. My discussion will be restricted to Topicalization, Stylistic Fronting, Expletive Insertion and verb placement in different types of embedded clauses in Icelandic and related languages, in particular Faroese and Övdalian. My judgment data comes from about 1600 speakers of Icelandic, 48 speakers of Faroese, 52 speakers of Övdalian and 24 speakers of Western-Jutlandic. I also used corpora of spoken and written modern Icelandic and student essays. The general research questions relate to the size and structural properties of the CP and IP, structural interrelations of these constructions and the extent to which the conditions of the word order phenomena under investigation depend on the clause type. A general finding of the work presented here is that Icelandic is not syntactically unique among the Scandinavian languages, as is sometimes assumed.

Piotr Garbacz (Oslo)

The Split IP Parameter and the Swedish dialects of Ovansiljan

Bobaljik & Höskuldur Thráinsson (1998) claim that standard varieties of Mainland Scandinavian (Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish) have a so-called unsplit IP, whereas Icelandic and the Old Scandinavian languages have a so-called split IP. They assume independent tense and agreement morphology on verbs to be crucial evidence triggering the positive value of the Split IP Parameter. Consequently, their prediction is that the following four constructions should be found in Inslular Scandinavian, but not in Mainland Scandinavian: (1) Object Shift of full DP objects, (2) Transitive Expletive Construction (TEC), (3) higher subject position in expletive constructions, and (4) V_{fin}-Adv order in all types of embedded clauses (i.e. V-to-I movement). This prediction is borne out in case of Icelandic and standard Swedish, Norwegian, and Danish.

In my talk I will present new syntactical findings from the Swedish vernaculars spoken in the Ovansiljan region and I will discuss these in the light of the Split IP Parameter theory. I will argue that findings from these vernaculars challenge the Split IP Parameter theory to a much higher degree than any other Scandinavian variety examined hitherto. Eventually, I will also ask the question whether the four syntactic phenomena that have been argued to be an outcome of the Split IP can be described in terms of the Split IP, and more importantly, whether there is a connection between separable tense and agreement marking and the Split IP.

Höskuldur Thráinsson (Reykjavík)

Icelandic A, B, C, D ... ? Or: How Long is the Icelandic Alphabet?

In this paper I will argue that it is an oversimplification to assume that Icelandic can basically be split into two or three dialects with respect to syntactic phenomena of the kind under discussion. I will use data from an extensive survey of syntactic variation in Icelandic to illustrate that variation in Icelandic syntax is in fact much less clean and clearcut than a classification into Icelandic A, B, C etc. suggests. Thus we typically find that speakers allow fronting of non-subjects in embedded clauses to a varying degree, they accept agreement with nominative objects to a varying degree, etc.

   Based on this data, I will argue that the assumption that languages typically fall into well-defined (or -definable) and clean dialects is an illusion which results partly from the research methods that have been common in linguistics. As long as we limit our surveys to a few speakers and relatively few examples or constructions, we can with some idealization group the speakers according to a few well-defined syntactic dialects. But once we extend our surveys to a larger numbers of speakers, it will become clear that things are not as neat as we might want them to be, especially not when languages are "in the process of changing". This has important consequences for the way we need to think about variation and parameters ― and this may be the real "Icelandic challenge".

Svetlana Petrova (Berlin)

Embedded V2 in Middle Low German

Embedded V2, i.e. fronting of the finite verb to a lower CP in complements of bridge verbs, is considered typical for VO languages (Danish, Faroese, Norwegian and Swedish) but exceptional in OV languages, with Frisian being the only modern OV language displaying this property. Historical evidence has been taken to weaken the exceptional status of embedded V2 in OV languages, but the data is sparse and provides no diagnostics allowing for a safe interpretation of the facts. A historical corpus that helps us to overcome this empirical problem is Middle Low German. It has strict OV order but displays V2 in complement clauses introduced by an overt complementizer. The following properties are crucial for an interpretation in line with embedded V2: i. Superficial V2 is not restricted to subject-verb orders but attested in complement clauses with a non-subject in first position. ii. We find diagnostic evidence suggesting that the verb is moved to the left because it crosses typical VP elements like *nicht* expressing sentential negation. iii. We observe a strong tendency for embedded V2 to occur after the verb 'to know', a canonical representative of the class of bridge verbs in modern Scandinavian. Following these considerations, we argue in favour of an analysis of the V2-orders in MLG as instances of embedded V2, in line with the interpretation of comparable data in modern Scandinavian. This in turn suggests that embedded V2 is not exceptional in OV languages.

Hans-Martin Gärtner (Berlin)

Medium-Distance Anaphora

Proper understanding of the division of labor between grammar (binding) and pragmatics (logophoric construal) in the analysis of Icelandic long-distance reflexives can be enhanced by a look at "medium distance anaphora" as discussed by Reuland & Sigurjónsdóttir (1997) (cf. Thráinsson 2007). I will show that the evidence presented there against logophoric construal in MDA is inconclusive. It will be argued that a hitherto unnoticed constraint on speech-and-thought representation in Icelandic is involved.

Reuland, Eric, and Sigriður Sigurjónsdóttir. 1997. "Long Distance 'Binding' in Icelandic: Syntax or Discourse?" Pp. 323-340 in *Atomism and Binding*, edited by Hans Bennis, Pierre Pica, and Johan Rooryck. Dordrecht: Foris.

Thráinsson, Höskuldur. 2007. *The Syntax of Icelandic*. Cambridge: CUP.