

The Accusative Subject Generalization

Abstract. This article discusses the morphosyntax of accusative subject constructions in Icelandic, from the point of view of the ‘dependent case’ analysis of accusative. The primary focus is on deriving the Accusative Subject Generalization (ASG), the generalization that accusative subjects are never related thematically to a morphologically intransitive verb. After it is demonstrated that the ASG holds, it is proposed that the ASG follows from the claim that there is no such thing as inherently case-marked accusatives in Icelandic. The accusative subject constructions under scrutiny in fact involve a silent external argument that distributes like a clitic syntactically and is interpreted like a weather pronoun semantically. The account is explanatory insofar as it involves one stipulation—the presence of a silent clitic—from which the ASG and numerous other syntactic, semantic, and morphological properties of accusative subject constructions follow. The explanatory value of the account hinges on a grammatical architecture where morphological idiosyncrasy and semantic idiosyncrasy are computed in distinct components of the grammar, and case marking—even structural case marking—is divorced from DP licensing.

Keywords. case-marking, dependent case, accusative case, fate accusatives, quirky case, oblique subjects, Icelandic syntax, weather verbs,

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1. Introduction

Syntactic configurations involving accusative subjects in Icelandic have been widely discussed since their discovery (Andrews 1976; Zaenen and Maling 1984; Ottósson 1988; H. Sigurðsson 1989, 2006, 2009, 2011, 2012; Haider 2001; Svenonius 2002, 2005, 2006; Platzack 2006; Schäfer 2008, 304ff., 2012). In this article, I focus in particular on the architectural and analytical implications of what I will call the Accusative Subject Generalization (ASG), which is given in (1).

- (1) **Accusative Subject Generalization** (ASG): Accusative subjects in Icelandic are never thematic arguments of morphologically intransitive verbs.

By ‘subjects’, I refer to the structural subjects of finite clauses; all of the DPs referred to as ‘subjects’ in this paper pass the by now classic subjecthood tests (Andrews 1976, 1982; Thráinsson 1979, 462–476; Zaenen et al 1985; H. Sigurðsson 1989, 204–209; Jónsson 1996, 115–124). By ‘morphologically intransitive’, I mean both passive verbs and verbs which take special affixes or stem morphology in the intransitive variant of transitive-intransitive alternations.

The ASG has some antecedents in the literature, as we will see below, but is different from them in important ways. I will argue that it follows from the claim that there is no such thing as lexical/quirky/inherent accusative in Icelandic.¹ Instead, accusative is assigned to a DP as dependent case, when that DP is c-commanded by a higher nominative or accusative DP. Accusative subjects arise whenever some aspect of the structure allows the accusative to move past that higher DP into the subject position.

The reason that many accusative subjects appear to be lexical/quirky/inherent—i.e., selected idiosyncratically by some verb—is that one structural configuration that allows the accusative to move higher also leads to a special, idiosyncratic semantic contribution from the verbal root. Consider the following sentences.

¹In this claim, I ignore arguments of prepositions, such as *um* ‘about’ (which takes an accusative object), and focus solely on verbal arguments.

(2) a. Ég leysti hnútinn.
I.NOM loosened knot.the.ACC
'I loosened the knot.'

b. Snjóa leysti.
snow.ACC loosened
'The snow melted.'

(Ottósson, 1989, 44)

In (2a), *leysa* means 'loosen', whereas in (2b) it seems to mean 'melt'. From a semantic point of view, it may appear as though we have a 'different verb' altogether. Therefore, from the perspective of a lexicalist theory, where idiosyncrasy is listed in one 'dictionary entry' under the verb, it would seem to make sense to treat the verb in the accusative subject construction as a separate verb: *leysa* in (2a) has a different meaning and a different case frame from *leysa* in (2b). However, from the perspective of a theory like Distributed Morphology (DM), where semantic idiosyncrasy and morphological idiosyncrasy are distributed into two separate lists (Marantz, 2013), each of which does not see the other, a different approach is possible: syntactically and morphologically, we have the same lexical root, but semantically, this root makes a distinct contribution in configurations where the accusative is able to move to the subject position.

I will propose that what is special about sentences like (2b) is that they contain a silent external argument with the syntax of an argument clitic and the semantics of a weather pronoun. The clitic status of the external argument allows the accusative internal argument to move past it, into the subject position. The interpretation of this external argument is unremarkable in the context of a weather verb like *rigna* 'rain', but in the context of other eventive verb phrases, will often only make sense if the lexical root makes a noticeably distinct semantic contribution. Such cases are, essentially, 'idiomatically combining expressions' in the sense of Nunberg et al (1994): they are semantically compositional, but the interpretive contribution of the individual lexical items is not a priori predictable on the basis of the ordinary interpretation assigned to them in isolation.

This study has important methodological and theoretical implications. Our theory of case should not be constructed in isolation from morphological and semantic considerations: in the present case, the morphological generalization (the ASG) suggests to us that there is an external argument present, and further investigation supports this. If we allow verbs to idiosyncratically select for accusative subjects, we miss the fact that such verbs have special semantics and never

show intransitive morphological marking. Moreover, the present analysis, if correct, forces us to admit that ordinary structural accusatives can move to the subject position, further dissociating the theory of DP licensing from the theory of case marking. Finally, while the results of the present study are consistent with a number of theories of case marking, it provides particular support for a dependent case analysis of accusative arguments of verbs (Marantz, 1991/2000; H. Sigurðsson, 2000; McFadden, 2004). The latter provides an explanation for why accusative subject constructions are possible, but marked. They are possible because case assignment is distinct from DP licensing, but they are marked because generally, the closest DP to the subject position moves there, and that will be the DP conditioning accusative case, not the one receiving it. Something special has to happen, structurally, for a DP to get accusative case and then A-move past the very DP that conditioned accusative case assignment.²

The study is organized as follows. In section 2, I provide a brief overview of the dependent case analysis of accusative to set the analytical backdrop for the remaining discussion. In section 3, I establish the ASG in detail by comparing accusative subject verbs to verbs taking dative and genitive subjects. In section 4, I discuss the semantics associated with accusative subject constructions. In section 5, I present and defend an analysis that derives the ASG and accounts for other semantic and syntactic properties of accusative subject constructions. In section 6, I turn to an aspect of my account that distinguishes it from its closest relatives—the clitic status of the external argument—and support that aspect of the analysis on the grounds that it derives otherwise puzzling facts about participle (non)agreement with accusative subjects. Finally, in section 7, I discuss how the results of the present study provide support for the theory of dependent case mentioned above, and how the proposal explains without further stipulation the lack of accusative-nominative constructions in favor of accusative-accusative constructions.

2. Dependent Case

In the discussion below, I will argue that accusative subject constructions are special syntactically, semantically and morphologically. While the facts and analyses discussed in this article

²I want to be clear here that nothing in the dependent case theory forces us to analyze all accusative DPs as dependent accusatives (rather than ‘inherent’ accusatives). My claim is that adopting the assumption that accusative subjects are dependent accusatives explains the ASG.

are compatible in principle with various views on how nominative and accusative case marking works, it seems to me that if we say that accusative case is always dependent case, we have an explanation for WHY accusative subjects are special. In a dependent case analysis of the sort advocated here, case-marking is computed on the basis of hierarchical relations between DPs, in a way that is completely independent from DP licensing (Yip et al, 1987; Marantz, 1991/2000; H. Sigurðsson, 2000; McFadden, 2004). If two DPs are in the same domain, and neither is marked with “inherent” case, then one will get dependent case, and the other will get an unmarked case. For nominative-accusative systems, if DP_α c-commands DP_β from an A-position, then DP_β gets dependent case, and this is what we call accusative; DP_α will be the unmarked case (nominative). (See Wood (2011) for a more detailed discussion.) This is schematized in (3).

- (3) a. [Case Domain ... $DP_{\alpha\text{Unmarked}}$... $DP_{\beta\text{Unmarked}}$...]
 DP_α c-commands DP_β from an A-position →
 b. [Case Domain ... $DP_\alpha\text{-CASE1}$... $DP_\beta\text{-CASE2}$...] =
 c. [Case Domain ... $DP_\alpha\text{-NOM}$... $DP_\beta\text{-ACC}$...]

As we will see in more detail below, the subject in Icelandic is whatever DP is closest to SpecTP, regardless of case marking.³ This broad picture—‘closeness’ in conjunction with dependent accusative—rules out dependent accusative subjects, in the general case. When there are two unmarked DPs, the higher one becomes the subject, by closeness; the lower one becomes accusative, by dependent case. Thus, the conditions for accusative case, in general, force the presence of a DP which is closer to SpecTP. The reason that accusatives have a hard time ending up in SpecTP, then, is that T attracts the closest DP, which will generally be DP_α —the DP conditioning accusative case, not the one receiving it. Therefore, something special has to happen, structurally, to allow (and even force) an accusative DP to move to the subject position.⁴

³Sometimes, two DPs can be equally close to SpecTP (Wood, 2011; Wood and H. Sigurðsson, 2014); these configurations will not be discussed here.

⁴As a terminological note, I will still refer to accusatives (and nominatives) as being structurally case-marked, with the understanding that structural case-marking is analyzed as in (3).

3. Establishing the Accusative Subject Generalization

In this section, I will unpack the ASG, defend it, and discuss antecedents to it in the literature. I turn first to the present understanding of ‘morphologically intransitive’. There are essentially four subcases to consider: passive morphology, *-na* morphology, *-st* morphology, and intransitive stem morphology. All four cases, in one way or another, indicate morphologically the absence of a syntactic external argument, and all are compatible with non-nominative subjects; but crucially, none of them occur with accusative subjects.

3.1 *Passive morphology*

It is well known that when a verb assigns dative or genitive case to an object in Icelandic, that case is generally preserved under passivization (although not in adjectival passives; see [E. Sigurðsson \(2015a\)](#) for recent, detailed discussion), despite the fact that the dative moves to the subject position. This is exemplified in (4).⁵

- (4) a. Hafði Jón splundrað rúðunni?
 had John.NOM shattered window.the.DAT
 ‘Had John shattered the window?’
- b. Var rúðunni splundrað?
 was window.the.DAT shattered.PASS
 ‘Was the window shattered?’

- (5) a. Veitingahúsin krefjast nafnskírteina.
 restaurants.the.NOM demand ID.cards.GEN
 ‘The restaurants demand ID cards.’
- b. Nafnskírteina er krafist.
 ID.cards.GEN is demanded.PASS
 ‘ID cards are demanded.’

([Thráinsson, 2007](#), 286)

We find no such alternations with accusative arguments, and it is not obvious why. If verbs are capable of taking ‘inherent’ accusative arguments, and verbs are capable of taking ‘inherently case marked’ objects whose case is preserved under passivization, why wouldn’t some verbs take an inherently case-marked accusative object that is preserved under passivization? One might object that such a system would result in too much confusion for Icelandic

⁵The *-st* morpheme in (5) is present in both the active and passive pairs, and is therefore not relevant to the current generalization. See [Wood \(2015, 285\)](#) for some discussion.

speakers—that is, that in the object position, it would be too difficult to distinguish an inherent accusative from a structural accusative. However, this potential objection is undermined by the fact that we see exactly this state of affairs with dative objects in Faroese: some of them stay dative in the passive, while others become nominative.

(6) Faroese Passives

- a. Teir hjálptu { **honum** / * **hann** } uppáttur á turt.
they.NOM helped { him.DAT / * him.ACC } back on dry (land)
'They helped him back on dry land.'
- b. * **Honum** varð hjálpt uppáttur á turt.
he.DAT was helped back on dry
- c. **Hann** varð hjálptur uppáttur á turt.
he.NOM was helped again on dry
'He was helped back on dry land.'

(Thráinsson et al, 2004, 268)

- (7) a. Teir dugnaðu **honum**.
they helped him
'They helped him.'
- b. **Honum** varð dugnað.
him.DAT was helped
'He was helped.'
- c. * **Hann** varð dugnaður.
he.NOM was helped

(Thráinsson et al, 2004, 267)

According to Thráinsson et al (2004, 267), the non-case-preserving pattern in (6) is the more common one. Whether dative is preserved or not seems to depend on the verb (Thráinsson et al, 2004, 269fn45). What this shows is that it is perfectly possible to have a system where one and the same case is preserved in the passive for some verbs, but not preserved in the passive for other verbs.

In Icelandic, however, this does not happen with accusative objects. It would be easy to see what it would look like if it did happen. Consider the alternation in (8), where (8b) is an instance of what H. Sigurðsson (2006) calls the 'Fate Accusative' construction, which I will return to in some detail below.

- (8) a. Sjórinna braut bátinn í spón.
 sea.the.NOM broke boat.the.ACC to pieces
 ‘The sea broke the boat to pieces.’
- b. Bátinn braut í spón.
 boat.the.ACC broke to pieces
 ‘The boat broke to pieces.’ (H. Sigurðsson, 1989, 276)

We might imagine that a verb like (8a) could be passivized and preserve accusative case. As illustrated in (9a), this is impossible (no matter what form of the passive participle we choose).

- (9) a. *Bátinn var {brot-inn /brot-na /brot-ið } í spón.
 boat.the.ACC.M was {broken-NOM.M /broken-ACC.M /broken-DFLT} to pieces
- b. Báturinn var brot-inn í spón.
 boat.the.NOM was broken-NOM.SG.M to pieces
 ‘The boat was broken to pieces.’

This is not just a special property of *brjóta* ‘break’; there are no instances of (9a) in Icelandic.

Consider also a sentence like (10a). In this sentence, we have an accusative object and an accusative subject. Since the verb appears to select its case frame inherently, we might try to passivize it and see if the accusative can be retained.⁶ It turns out that the verb cannot be passivized at all, no matter what case the remaining object has.

- (10) a. Marga vantar peninga.
 many.ACC needs money.PL.ACC
 ‘Many need money.’
- b. *Peningar eru vantaðir (af mörgum).
 money.PL.NOM are needed (by many)
 INTENDED: ‘Money is needed (by many).’ (Thráinsson, 2007, 258)
- c. *Peninga er vantað (af mörgum).
 money.PL.ACC is needed (by many)
 INTENDED: ‘Money is needed (by many).’

This might not have anything to do with case; Thráinsson (2007, 258) notes that even a nominative-accusative verb with a similar meaning, like *þurfa* ‘need’, cannot be passivized. However, this

⁶We will see below, however, that it makes more sense to consider both accusative DPs in (10a) to be dependent accusatives.

is not an isolated example; accusative-accusative verbs generally cannot be passivized.⁷

Note that there is no general structural ban on having an accusative subject in a passive construction; this is shown in (11).

- (11) Bátana er talið hafa brotið í spón.
boats.the.ACC are believed have broken in pieces
'The boats are believed to have broken to pieces.' (Zaenen and Maling, 1990, 145)

Here, however, the accusative subject is not a thematic argument of the passive verb. It is the higher, ECM verb that is passivized and the lower, selecting verb to which the subject is thematically related, *brotið* 'broken', is not. This is compatible with the ASG, because *bátana* 'the boats.ACC' is not an argument of the morphologically passive verb—it is an argument of the morphologically transitive verb, *brotið* 'broken', exactly as it is in (8b) above.

Nor is there a general ban on passive morphology with accusative arguments. We see passive morphology with accusative arguments in a number of places. For example, Zaenen et al (1985, 458) point out that some cognate object constructions lead to two accusative objects. When these constructions are passivized, the second, cognate object remains accusative.⁸

- (12) a. Ég kyssti hverja konu tvo kossa.
I.NOM kissed each woman.ACC two kisses.ACC
'I kissed each woman two kisses.'
- b. Hver kona var kysst tvo kossa.
each woman.NOM was kissed two kisses.ACC
'Each woman was kissed two kisses.' (Einar Freyr Sigurðsson p.c.)

However, the accusative never becomes the subject in such cases.

Finally, in the 'New Impersonal Passive' (NIP) construction, which is accepted by mostly younger speakers, passive morphology may appear with an accusative internal argument.

- (13) % Það var kosið hana í gær.
EXPL was elected her.ACC yesterday
'She was elected yesterday.' (H. Sigurðsson, 1989, 355)

⁷In light of the analysis presented below, a reviewer suggests that this may be related to the fact that weather verbs resist passivization cross-linguistically, an interesting hypothesis that would be worth investigating further.

⁸Many speakers prefer dative on cognate objects instead; see Maling (2002) for discussion.

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002) (see also Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 1997, 2012, 2013, *in press*; Sigurjónsdóttir and Maling 2001; Maling 2006) argue that in this construction, passive morphology has been reanalyzed as active morphology.⁹ What is important in the present context is that the accusative argument cannot move to the subject position, regardless of the form of the verb. (12) and (13) thus show that even if accusative arguments are in principle compatible with morphologically passive verbs, those arguments cannot be subjects.

3.2 *-na morphology*

The *-na* morpheme appears on a lexically restricted set of verbs in the intransitive variant of the causative alternation. (See H. Sigurðsson 1989, Jónsson 2003, and Wood 2012, 2015 for discussion.) For example, the normal intransitive/anticausative of (8a) (repeated below in (14a)) is not (8b), but (14b). With the *-na* morpheme present, accusative is not possible (under any interpretation), as shown in (14c).¹⁰

- (14) a. Sjórinna braut bátinn í spón.
sea.the.NOM broke boat.the.ACC to pieces
'The sea broke the boat to pieces.'
- b. Báturinn brot-na-ði í spón.
boat.the.NOM break-NA-PAST to pieces
'The boat broke to pieces.' (H. Sigurðsson, 1989, 276)
- c. *Bátinn brot-na-ði í spón.
boat.the.ACC break-NA-PAST to pieces

Similarly, the intransitive/anticausative of *leysa* 'loosen' shown in (2a) (repeated below in (15a)) is not (2b), but (15b). Again, accusative is not possible, as illustrated in (15c).

⁹For other analyses with sometimes distinct theoretical assumptions, see Barðdal and Molnár (2000), Gísladóttir (2007), Eythórsson (2008), Jónsson (2009), H. Sigurðsson (2011), Árnadóttir et al (2011), Árnadóttir and E. Sigurðsson (2012), Schäfer (2012), Ingason et al (2012) and E. Sigurðsson (2012). The Dependent Case theory that is argued in the present study to explain the ASG is most straightforwardly compatible with analyses that assume the presence of some null external argument (which seems to be a growing consensus; see Legate 2014 for a recent overview and proposal), whether it is thematically interpreted or not. The NIP is, however, outside of the scope of the current study, since the accusative DP does not move to the subject position, so I refrain from choosing between competing analyses here.

¹⁰I will return below to the difference between (14b) and (8b); they have different semantic interpretations. For now, what is relevant is the impossibility of (14c).

- (15) a. Ég leysti hnútinn.
I.NOM loosened knot.the.ACC
'I loosened the knot.'
- b. Hnúturinn los-na-ði.
knot.the.NOM loosen-NA-PAST
'The knot loosened/came loose.'
- c. * { Snjóa / Hnútinn } los-na-ði.
{ snow.ACC / knot.the.ACC } loosen-NA-PAST

As with passives, alternations with *-na* seem to single out accusatives as special. At least some dative arguments can be retained in the presence of *-na*, as shown in the following alternation from H. Sigurðsson (1989):¹¹

- (16) a. Ég hita henni.
I.NOM warm her.DAT
'I warm her.'
- b. Henni hit-na-r.
her.DAT warms-NA-PRES
'She becomes warm(er).'
- (H. Sigurðsson, 1989, 273)

Along similar lines, certain dative-nominative verbs include the *-na* suffix. (17a–b) show a *-na* alternation with 'improve'. (17c) shows that the intransitive form allows a dative subject (with a somewhat distinct meaning).

- (17) a. Ég ætla að bæta ástand mitt.
I.NOM intend to improve situation my.ACC
'I'm going to improve my situation.'
- b. Ástand mitt bat-na-ði aldrei.
situation my.NOM improve-NA-PST never
'My situation never improved.'
- (Wood, 2015, 241)
- c. Mér bat-na-ði veikin.
me.DAT improve-NA-PST disease.the.NOM
'I recovered from the disease.'
- (H. Sigurðsson, 1989, 201)

¹¹As far as I know, there are no genitive subjects with *-na* verbs, or *-st* verbs, as we will see below. This is not necessarily surprising, since genitive subjects are rather rare in Icelandic (Thráinsson, 2007, 287). Jónsson (2005, 405–406) lists 50 verbs that may head accusative subject constructions, and only 7 that head (non-passive) genitive subject constructions. Jónsson 2003, 157–159, which includes verbs that "are no longer part of the active vocabulary of Modern Icelandic," lists 162 accusative subject verbs.

While the meaning of the verb in (17c) may be distinct from that of (17a–b), the data are still relevant to the ASG. The claim is that the ASG holds regardless of any meaning differences—it is a claim about the morphological form of verbs with accusative subject arguments (in contrast to the morphological form of verbs with dative and genitive subject arguments). We will see below numerous examples where the accusative subject construction involves a morphologically transitive verb with a special meaning. What is important is that in these accusative subject constructions, we never see intransitive *-na* suffixation.

It is important not to overstate the claim here. Jónsson (1997–1998, 2003) points out that preservation of dative with *-na* verbs (and *-st* verbs) is restricted to dative goals and experiencers; it does not occur with dative themes. But this does not alter the point here, since it stands that dative subjects can be arguments of morphologically intransitive *-na* verbs, while accusative subjects cannot. We might, for example, say that the dative arguments that show up with *-na* verbs are dependent not directly on the verb, but on an Appl(icative) head (Pylkkänen, 2002, 2008; McFadden, 2004; Schäfer, 2008; H. Sigurðsson, 2012; Wood, 2015). This is the translation, into a syntactic theory of argument structure, of an analysis that says case marking is related to thematic role assignment. From this perspective, the claim would be that accusative is different because accusative case is never dependent directly on an Appl head (or any other functional head), but rather depends on the presence of another DP argument, whether overt or not.

3.3 *-st* morphology

Like *-na*, the *-st* morpheme appears on the intransitive variant of the causative alternation for many verbs (H. Sigurðsson, 1989; Anderson, 1990; Jónsson, 2003; Wood, 2012, 2015). For example, the verb *fylla* ‘fill’ can be transitive, as shown in (18a), or take an accusative subject, as shown in (18b); both have the same morphological form. The anticausative, however, is derived with the *-st* morpheme, as illustrated in (18c); the accusative is not possible with this form.

- (18) a. Hún fyllti bátinn.
 she.NOM filled boat.the.ACC
 ‘She filled the boat.’

- b. Bátinn fyllti.
boat.the.ACC filled
'The boat swamped.'
- c. { *Bátinn / Baturinn } fylltist.
{ *boat.the.ACC / boat.the.NOM } filled-ST
'The boat got full (of something).'
- (H. Sigurðsson, 2006, 22)

As with passives and *-na* alternations, *-st* alternations do allow preservation of dative case. This is illustrated with the example in (19):

- (19) a. Þeir fyrirgáfu honum alla glæpina.
they.NOM forgave.3PL him.DAT all crimes.the.ACC
'They forgave him all his crimes.'
- b. Honum fyrirgáfust allir glæpirnir.
him.DAT forgave.3PL-ST all crimes.the.NOM
'He got forgiven all his crimes.'
- (Thráinsson, 2007, 290)

There are, in fact, numerous *-st* verbs with dative subjects. Many alternate with transitive verbs, as in (19), and many do not. But no accusative subject constructions have *-st* on the verb that selects the accusative.¹² The same explanation might be offered here as was offered there: dative subjects of *-st* verbs are dependent on a special Appl head. The ASG holds because accusative is not dependent on any argument-introducing head of the verbal domain, but is rather dependent on the presence of a higher DP (whether overt or not).

3.4 Intransitive stem forms

Icelandic also marks some transitive-intransitive alternations by changing the morphology of the stem. Take the case of *brenna* 'burn', for example.

- (20) a. Þeir **brenndu** bókina.
they.NOM burned.PST.TR book.the.ACC
'They burned the book.'
- b. Bókin **brann**.
book.the.NOM burned.PST.INTR
'The book burned.'

¹²As with the *-na* verbs discussed above, there are also no *-st* verb constructions with genitive subjects.

As seen in (20), the past tense form for *brenna* ‘burn’ is different in the transitive versus the intransitive form. In the transitive form, the stem is always *brenn-*, but in the intransitive form, the stem form is *brann-*, *brenn-*, *brunn-* or *brynn-*, depending on tense, number and mood (Wood, 2015, 127). The intransitive form can take a dative subject in the idiom DAT *brenna fyrir brjósti* ‘DAT cares deeply about’ (lit. ‘burns before breast’) (Friðjónsson 2006, 111). An attested example (discussing Bob Marley) is presented in (21).

- (21) Honum **brann** fyrir brjósti þrælatakan og nýlendustefnan.
 him.DAT burned.PST.INTR before breast slavery.NOM and colonialism.NOM
 ‘He cared deeply about slavery and colonialism.’¹³

There are, however, no constructions where a specifically intransitive form like past tense *brann* ‘burned’ takes an accusative subject.

3.5 *Summary and Antecedents*

The previous subsections have looked at four distinct ways in which a verb can be morphologically intransitive in Icelandic: passives, *-na* verbs, *-st* verbs, and intransitive stem forms. These four kinds of morphological alternations all reflect configurations where the intransitive form, unlike the transitive form, has no syntactic external argument. For each of these, we find cases where the intransitive form allows a dative subject. For passives, we also find genitive subjects.

What is striking is that none of these forms allow accusative subjects. This would be surprising if accusative subjects were associated with particular verbs in the lexicon, or in some other way specified as part of the argument structure of the verb. Even in a non-lexicalist account of dative subjects, there is a way to capture the lexical idiosyncrasies: a verb root might select for an Appl head, for example, and the latter assigns dative to its argument. From that perspective, the claim would have to be that no argument-introducing heads (like Appl) select specifically for an accusative argument.¹⁴

¹³<http://www.mbl.is/greinasafn/grein/1000261/>

¹⁴To be clear, the point here is not to argue specifically against a lexicalist or for a non-lexicalist approach to inherent case selection. The point is that no matter how the grammar does inherent case selection, the ASG is surprising if accusative subjects can be selected—directly or indirectly—by a verbal root.

Similar considerations go for a suggestion made by a reviewer, namely that accusative subject constructions involve a special *v*-head but no syntactic external argument. Such an account would make it easy to see why the accusative moves to the subject position, but it would not explain the ASG. What the morphological markers discussed in the previous sections indicate is exactly the absence of a syntactic external argument, which is often analyzed as a Voice alternation. That is, the intransitive morphology is telling us that there is no Voice head, or that there is a marked, expletive Voice head (Schäfer, 2008; Alexiadou et al, 2015). If accusative subject constructions involved a special *v*-head, with no external-argument-introducing Voice head (or no external argument, generally), then we would expect the morphology to be able to be sensitive to this: Voice would be absent (or expletive) in the accusative subject variant, and we would expect its absence to be reflected morphologically.¹⁵

There have been several precedents to the ASG in the literature. Zaenen and Maling (1984) discussed transitive-intransitive alternations in some detail, focusing on dative and accusative. They noticed that in some cases, a transitive-intransitive alternation would involve ‘case preservation’, where the case assigned to the object in the transitive shows up on the subject in the intransitive. They observed that “for case-preserving verb pairs, the inflectional paradigms of the transitive verb and the intransitive verb are the same” (Zaenen and Maling, 1984, 323). What they are referring to specifically are the cases I referred to in the previous subsection as ‘intransitive stem forms’. For them, this pattern indicated that the case-preserving pairs were the ‘same verb’ in both transitive and intransitive frames, whereas the non-case-preserving alternations might be thought to involve different verbs.¹⁶ Their generalization, however, did not exclude the possibility of, say, stand-alone *-na*-suffixed verbs that are specified lexically to take accusative subjects. Jónsson (1997–1998, 2003, 2005) has documented various restrictions on what kinds

¹⁵To put it another way, the reviewer’s suggestion makes accusative subject constructions too similar to dative subject constructions. With (certain) dative subject constructions, you have dative case depending on one head (Appl), and morphological markers indicating, at least sometimes, the absence of a syntactic external argument. If accusative depends on a single head, and there is no syntactic external argument, we have no reason to predict or expect that the absence of a syntactic external argument wouldn’t be marked morphologically.

¹⁶Note that in the present theory, being the same verb means having the same verb root and the same verbal heads (*v*, Voice, etc.).

of arguments verbs with particular suffixes may take, and has also discussed the somewhat surprising absence of accusative subjects with such morphology (Jónsson, 2003, 148). Along similar lines, Thráinsson (2007, 297) writes: “There are apparently no *-st*-verbs with accusative or genitive subjects. Genitive subjects are very rare anyway, but the non-existence of accusative subjects with *-st*-verbs might call for an explanation.”

These descriptions differ from the present one in at least two ways. First, I think it is important to emphasize the special status of accusative subjects in Icelandic, in a way that distinguishes them from dative and genitive subjects. Not only do they not occur with *-st*, but they do not occur with any intransitivizing morphology (passives, *-na* or intransitive stem forms). They are distinct from datives in that the latter may occur with all forms of intransitivizing morphology, in at least some uses; and they are distinct from genitives in that they are far less rare, and the latter may occur with passives. Second, I think it is equally important to emphasize that while verbs that take accusative subjects are lexically idiosyncratic, in that one cannot necessarily predict which verbs are going to take accusative subjects—as Jónsson (1997–1998, 2003, 2005) has repeatedly emphasized—they are in a large proportion of cases semantically idiosyncratic USES of independently-occurring transitive verbs. From a morphological perspective, we do not have a big list of verbs that are listed in the lexicon as taking accusative subjects; what we have is a bunch of normally transitive verbs that can take accusative subjects with an idiomatic semantic interpretation.

These two considerations should be taken to be two sides of the same coin. Accusative subject constructions are special: they are special morphologically (in that they depend on a transitive verb form) and they are special semantically (in that they often require special, idiosyncratic verb semantics). Accounting for them in the same way that we account for dative and genitive subjects would be a mistake. My claim is that the morphological specialness gives us a clue as to the nature of the semantic specialness: accusative subject constructions are syntactically transitive, with an unpronounced thematic subject. The presence of this subject is responsible for both the idiosyncratic semantics of the verbs involved and their morphologically transitive form.

4. The Special Semantics of Accusative Subject Constructions

As mentioned at several points above, accusative subject constructions may have special semantic interpretations. This is particularly so for what H. Sigurðsson (2006, 20) called ‘Fate Accusatives’ (FAs). For FAs, the accusative is a theme or patient and there is “an uncontrolled process or fate reading.” Canonical examples of FAs were presented in (8b) and (18b) above, and weather constructions like (2b) might be included as well. H. Sigurðsson (2006, 20–21) discusses how he intends the term ‘fate’ to be understood:

As pointed out to me by Kjartan Ottósson, the notion ‘fate’ may not be entirely satisfactory here. The most common type of these predicates typically involves the natural forces as the source or the ‘hidden agent’ of the event (as discussed in Ottósson 1988). However, this does not extend to all examples of this sort, for instance [(22)] and [(23)] below. I therefore take the liberty of using the notion ‘fate’ as a cover term for forces that are not in human power.

- (22) Mennina bar að í þessu.
men.the.ACC carried towards in that
‘The men arrived then.’
- (23) Mann hrekur stundum af leið.
one.ACC drives sometimes off track
‘Sometimes one loses one’s track/gets carried away.’

To give some examples of the kind of ‘fate’ reading that Sigurðsson has in mind, consider the examples in (24) ((24a) repeated from (18b) above).

- (24) a. Bátinn fyllti.
boat.the.ACC filled
‘The boat swamped.’
- b. Mig tók út.
me.ACC took out
‘I was swept overboard.’

(24a) does not, and cannot, mean that the boat generally got filled in the normal manner, for example with cargo or passengers; it only means that “the boat unexpectedly and dangerously got filled with water” (H. Sigurðsson, 2006, 24–25). (24b) cannot mean that I was taken out

of the boat or left the boat in some ordinary way; it “has only one, very specific meaning the fate reading that I ‘accidentally swept [overboard]’” (H. Sigurðsson, 2006, 25). These semantic restrictions are only found on the accusative subject variant: they are not found in the passive, active, or morphologically-marked intransitive forms.¹⁷

It is worth briefly elaborating how restrictions like this can be encoded in the DM framework assumed here. In that theory, lexical roots are semantically underspecified; their interpretation is fixed post-syntactically, where the syntactic structure a root is embedded in can affect its interpretation (Arad, 2003).¹⁸ Harley (2014, 244), for example, describes the various interpretations of the English word *throw* as a set of post-syntactic interface instructions.

(25)	<u>PF Instructions</u>	<u>LF Instructions</u>
	$\sqrt{77} \leftrightarrow /θrow/$	$\sqrt{77} \leftrightarrow$ “vomit” / [v [[$\sqrt{\quad}$] _√ [up] _P]] _{vP}
		\leftrightarrow “a light blanket” / [n [$\sqrt{\quad}$] _√]
		{ ... other meanings in other contexts. ... }
		\leftrightarrow “throw” / elsewhere

On the PF side, the root \sqrt{THROW} is given the phonemic representation /θrow/.¹⁹ On the LF side, the interpretation of that root is determined on the basis of surrounding structure. Notice that \sqrt{THROW} has an elsewhere interpretation that applies when none of the more specific syntactic configurations are present. Harley (2014) argues that some roots have no elsewhere

¹⁷It is not enough to say that FA verbs are underspecified for cause, in the sense of Levin and Rappaport Hovav (1995). First of all, not all cause unspecified verbs can even form FAs. As Halldór Sigurðsson (p.c.) points out to me, *drepa* ‘kill’ is a cause unspecified verb, and cannot form a FA: **Þá hafði drepð fjóra menn í óveðrinu* ‘Then four men.ACC killed in the storm’. Second, the special semantics of FAs go beyond simple underspecified causation, and acquire rather specific lexical meanings.

¹⁸Whether this happens at the first categorizing head or upon the introduction of the agent is still debated; see Marantz (2013), Harley (2014) and Anagnostopoulou and Samioti (2014) for recent discussion. The consensus seems to be that at least idiomatic interpretation is not limited to the first categorizing head, although the first categorizing head may play a role in ‘alloseme’ selection (Marantz, 2013). The finer points of these issues need not concern us directly here.

¹⁹Harley (2014) adopts the position that forms like past tense *threw* are derived by phonological readjustment of this initial phonemic representation. The notation $\sqrt{77}$ is used because Harley (2014) argues that roots do not have any phonological features prior to spellout.

interpretation; given that, some roots will have a limited syntactic distribution without having any specific syntactic selectional features; selectional features are, essentially, recast as sets of LF interpretative functions.²⁰

Consider now how this applies to the analysis of accusative subject configurations. I will illustrate this with respect to the sentences in (26).

- (26) a. Ég leysti hnútinn.
I.NOM loosened knot.the.ACC
'I loosened the knot.'
- b. Hnúturinn los-na-ði.
knot.the.NOM loosen-NA-PAST
'The knot loosened/came loose.'
- c. Snjóa leysti.
snow.ACC loosened
'The snow melted.'
- (Ottósson, 1989, 44)

Syntactically, I claim that accusative subject constructions have a null external argument clitic CL.²¹ This clitic may affect the semantic interpretation of the root in two ways. First, it has its own semantics; combining the observations of Schäfer and Sigurðsson discussed further below, it is the referentially underspecified agent responsible for forces that are not in human power. This will restrict the set of possible interpretations of vPs and the roots contained in them. Second, to the extent that particular roots have unpredictable semantic properties beyond this, those properties will be specified post-syntactically much as in (25) above. In (26), the root $\sqrt{\text{LEYS}}$ will be interpreted as a melting event in the context of the null external argument clitic, and as 'become loose' elsewhere.²² On the PF side, the root is pronounced [leis] in the context of a syntactic external argument and as [los] in the context of a specifierless, unaccusative voice head. (According to Wood (2015), the *-na* suffix is the spellout of this unaccusative voice head.)

²⁰Roots that only occur as accusative-subject taking verbs, such as some experiencer accusative verbs, can be analyzed as lacking an elsewhere form.

²¹The features of this clitic are discussed in more detail below.

²²Or, as a reviewer suggests, when a vP containing $\sqrt{\text{LEYS}}$ is interpreted as a melting event, it selects a particular kind of subject, namely the weather pronoun. The issues raised in footnote 18 are relevant to the choice between these two options.

The specific analytical claim will be that accusative subject constructions involve a null external argument, which has the semantics of a weather pronoun and the syntax of a clitic. This weather clitic bears nominative case, but distributes differently from a full DP, with the result that the accusative moves to the subject position. The analysis to be defended is illustrated in (28) (where CL = clitic, and the external argument is in SpecVoiceP, as in Kratzer 1996).²³

- (28) [TP the boat_{ACC} T [VoiceP CL_{NOM} Voice [filled ⟨the boat_{ACC}⟩]]]

(29) a. Structurally case-marked accusatives must be able to move to the subject position.
b. Weather pronouns must be able to trigger idiosyncratic verb semantics.
c. Weather pronouns must be able to be silent in Icelandic.

²³Further details for the structure of (28) are omitted. For example, the verb will move to T, and as discussed further below, the clitic may move to a clitic licensing position above TP.

- d. Clitics must allow A-movement of DPs past them.
- e. Clitics must be able to trigger or block participial agreement.
- f. Clitics must be able to move out of infinitive clauses into superordinate clauses.

It should be fairly clear why (29a–d) are needed. (29e–f) warrant some further discussion, and in fact will be crucial in distinguishing the current account from already existing accounts.

Before showing that the propositions in (29) are indeed born out, I will first outline some existing proposals that are similar to mine (in that they propose a fundamentally non-lexical, syntactic account of accusative subjects) and sketch how mine differs from them. The proposals discussed below focused in general on a subtype of accusative subject construction that H. Sigurðsson (2006) calls the ‘Fate Accusative’ (FA). Most of my discussion will revolve around FAs as well, although I will claim that the analysis should extend to all accusative subject constructions. My proposal shares with the analysis in H. Sigurðsson (2006, 2011, 2012) the view that the case on accusative subjects is the same structural accusative as in transitives, and the special properties of the accusative subject constructions in question are attributed to the workings of the Voice system. In Sigurðsson’s work, accusative case is assigned by a marked v^* , and case alternations stem from manipulations of v^* . The *-st* morpheme, for example, reflects the presence of a special kind of expletive Voice head, $\text{Voice}_{\text{EXPL}}$, which does not license an external argument. In addition, $\text{Voice}_{\text{EXPL}}$ turns v^* into a v that does not assign accusative case. However, there are other subcategories of Voice, including $\text{Voice}_{\text{PSYCH}}$ and $\text{Voice}_{\text{FATE}}$. These Voice heads are like $\text{Voice}_{\text{EXPL}}$ in that they do not license an external argument, but they differ in that they leave the case-star features of v^* alone. The special semantics of accusative subject constructions stems from the [PSYCH]/[FATE] feature of $\text{Voice}_{\text{PSYCH/FATE}}$. Thus, the accusative case is ordinary accusative case (assigned by v^*), but the semantics come from a special syntactic feature that allows v^* without an external argument. The present account is similar in that the accusative case is the same, ordinary, structural accusative case assigned to objects. It differs, however, in that I invoke no special [PSYCH]/[FATE] feature, and instead propose with Schäfer (2008, 2012) that the special semantics is determined by the semantics, not by a syntactic feature.

The proposal that the accusative of accusative subject constructions is the same accusative as in transitives (i.e. that it arises through the same kind of dependency) is also a feature of

Haider (2001), Platzack (2006), and Schäfer (2008, 2012), with Haider (2001) being an early advocate of this view. In all of these proposals, there is a silent thematic external argument. Haider (2001) proposes that this argument is an expletive, and Platzack (2006) proposes that it has a special [FATE] feature, much like in Sigurðsson's work. Schäfer (2008, 2012) proposes that the external argument is a weather pronoun and argues that the referentially underspecified semantics of the weather pronoun is responsible for the special semantics, a view which I will also adopt here. However, Haider (2001), Platzack (2006) and Schäfer (2008) did not offer an account of how the accusative can move past the silent external argument. Schäfer (2012) does offer an account, but we will see below that this account is empirically insufficient in one crucial way.

I will now turn to each of the statements in (29) and show that they hold, providing support for the basic analysis in (28).

5.1 *Structural Accusative Subjects*

The present account, along with the others mentioned in the previous section, depends on the possibility that an ordinary accusative object can move to the subject position if the structural configuration is right. Although this conclusion may seem to be at odds with the Activity Condition (Chomsky, 2000, 123), there are independently attested constructions where this can be shown to be possible. (See also Nevins 2005.) In (30b), leftmost position of the auxiliary shows that the accusative argument has moved to the subject position, rather than a CP topic position. (30c) shows that this is not a normal property of the verb *finna* 'find', but rather arises only in the construction in (30b).²⁴ Following the terminology in Wood 2014, I will refer to this construction as the 'Existential Accusative' (EA) construction (terminology that I extend, for convenience, even to cases like (31) and (32), where the visible case is dative and genitive, respectively).

- (30) a. Ég fann Ólaf.
 I.NOM found Ólafur.ACC
 'I found Ólafur.'

²⁴The examples in (30)–(32) from H. Sigurðsson (1989, 218–219).

- b. Var Ólaf hvergi að finna?
was Ólafur.ACC nowhere to find
'Was Ólafur nowhere to be found?'
- c. *Ólaf fann hvergi.
Ólafur.ACC found nowhere

The examples in (31) and (32) show that the case marking is dependent on the embedded verb, and not a special property of the construction in question. If the embedded verb assigns dative, the derived subject will be dative. If the embedded verb assigns genitive, the derived subject will be genitive.

- (31) a. Ég heilsaði Ólafi.
I.NOM greeted Ólafur.DAT
'I greeted Ólafur.'
- b. Var því ekki að heilsa?
was it.DAT not to greet
'Was it (unfortunately) not the case?'
- c. *Því heilsaði ekki.
it.DAT greeted not
- (32) a. Ég vænti skipsins.
I.NOM expected ship.the.GEN
'I expected the ship.'
- b. Er skipsins því ekki að vænta nú.
is ship.the.GEN thus not to expect now
'The ship is thus not expected now.'
- c. *Skipsins væntir ekki nú.
ship.the.GEN expects not now

The fact that the case of the subject depends on the verb shows that the subject in (30b) gets accusative case for the same reason that the object gets accusative case in (30a).

Wood (2014) argues that what the EA construction shows is that given the right conditions, accusative objects are capable of moving to the subject position. In the case at hand, the accusative is apparently able to move past a nominative PRO subject in the infinitive. (See H. Sigurðsson 1991, 2008 and references therein for a demonstration that PRO can bear the same nominative case as overt DPs.)

- (33) [TP Ólaf_{ACC} [is nowhere [to PRO_{NOM} find ⟨Ólaf_{ACC}⟩]]]
- ↑

Wood (2014) provides evidence that in (30b), the accusative is A'-moved past PRO, and subsequently A-moved to the subject position (in violation of so-called 'improper movement' constraints; see Bader (2011)). E. Sigurðsson (2015b) makes a similar proposal (with distinct technical details) for Icelandic tough-movement constructions with accusative subjects.

Whatever the right analysis of accusative subjects of the sort in (30b) is, the point should be clear: there are configurations where a structurally case-marked accusative is able to move into the subject position. Nothing in principle prevents ordinary, accusative objects of transitive verbs from moving to SpecTP. The fact that this seems so rare follows from the dependent case analysis of accusative: accusative case is conditioned by the presence of a c-commanding DP, but that DP will then be closer to the subject position than the accusative. Thus, something special has to happen from a locality perspective for an accusative DP to move to the subject position. But the accusative case on a DP does not prevent it from moving to the subject position any more than nominative case on *Ólafur* in sentences such as (34b) prevents it from moving to the subject position (a claim that no one, as far as I know, would make).

- (34) a. Hafði Ólafur_i virst [t_i vera gáfaður]?
 had Ólafur.NOM seemed [t_i be intelligent]
 'Did Ólafur seem intelligent?'
 b. Hafði þeim virst [Ólafur vera gáfaður]?
 had them.DAT seemed [Ólafur.NOM be intelligent]
 'Did it seem to them that Ólafur was intelligent?' (H. Sigurðsson, 1996, 29)

It is locality that prevents DPs from moving to the subject position: in (34b), the nominative cannot move to the subject position because the dative DP introduced by the matrix raising verb is closer. (See H. Sigurðsson (2012) for thorough discussion.) In ordinary nominative-accusative sentences, the accusative cannot move to the subject position because the nominative DP (which determines the accusative case marking in the first place) is closer. Accusative subjects are special only in that their case is conditioned precisely by the presence of something that normally prevents them from moving to the subject position. And yet, constructions like (30b) show us that given the right structural circumstances, a structurally case-marked accusative DP can move to the subject position.

5.2 Weather Pronouns and Verb Semantics

In order for the present analysis to go through, it must be the case that a weather pronoun can (a) be a thematic argument of the verb, and moreover (b) be in some sense ‘responsible’ for or correlate with the idiosyncratic interpretation of the verb. This is also true of the analyses in Haider (2001) and Schäfer (2008, 2012). Taking the second point first, Haider and Schäfer support this claim by pointing out a number of similarities between the Icelandic construction and a German construction with a weather pronoun *es* ‘it’.²⁵

- (35) Trieb es den Kahn an den Strand?
 drove EXPL the boat.ACC to the beach
 ROUGHLY: ‘Did the boat drive on the beach?’ (Haider, 2001, ex.10b) (German)

What (35) illustrates is that an overt ‘expletive’ can be present in German constructions which have the same semantics as Icelandic FAs and which also condition accusative case.²⁶ The difference between Icelandic and German, then, would be that the external argument is overt in German, but silent in Icelandic. The expectation would then be that this difference carries over to weather verbs; as pointed out by Haider (2001) and exemplified by Schäfer (2008), this expectation is borne out: German retains an overt *es* with weather verbs (even in topicalization/V2 structures where other expletives cannot be overtly present), whereas Icelandic has no overt expletive/weather pronoun. This contrast between Icelandic and German is illustrated in (36) (adapted from H. Sigurðsson 2006, 18; see also Schäfer 2008, 293).²⁷

²⁵One reviewer points out that the German construction is generally informal and colloquial, while many Icelandic Fate Accusatives are formal, bookish and even old-fashioned sounding. (Another reviewer provides some examples which are, in his view, ordinary standard German.) Given that quite generally, what is standard/formal in one language (e.g. negative concord in Italian) can be nonstandard/informal in another (e.g. negative concord in English), I do not encode social effects of this kind in the structure-building rules.

²⁶According to Szucsich (2007), this expletive may cliticize to the verb in Bavarian German. Szucsich (2007) develops an analysis of Slavic ‘Adversity Impersonals’ that is very similar to the analysis of Fate Accusatives defended here, but a closer comparison between the two is beyond the scope of the present article.

²⁷Note that the ‘first-position’ expletive *það* will appear in Icelandic declarative sentences when nothing is topicalized. German has a similar ‘first-position’ expletive, but it is not used in weather constructions. It is not necessary, given that an overt thematic weather pronoun is moved into the first position.

- (36) a. Þá rigndi (*það) allan daginn.
 then rained (*EXPL) all day
 ‘Then, it rained all day.’ (Icelandic)
- b. Dann regnete *(es) den ganzen Tag.
 then rained *(EXPL) the whole day
 ‘Then, it rained all day.’ (German)

In general, we see exactly the connection across languages that we would expect. In a language where weather pronouns are overt, like German, the pronoun is overt in the German version of the Fate Accusative construction. In a language where weather pronouns are silent, like Icelandic, we see no pronoun, and instead have an accusative subject. We also expect that if Icelandic weather verbs introduce internal arguments, those arguments should move to the subject position; we will see that this expectation, too, is borne out. So the syntax is as we would expect it to be. What about the semantics?

Schäfer (2008) argues that weather pronouns are referentially underspecified and that the ‘Fate’ reading of the FA construction stems from an event that has a referentially underspecified agent. The idea is that for a referentially underspecified agent to say, drive a boat off course or fill it with water, we are necessarily talking about a different kind of event from normal boat-filling/driving events. Weather events generally (in some cases exclusively) allow a referentially underspecified agent. But for many events, there will simply not be any sensible reading; this derives the fact that not just any transitive verb can correspond to a FA—only specific verbs, with specific readings, allow this. (See also footnote 17.) While we cannot predict which particular verbs will ultimately allow the kind of weather verb syntax that leads to accusative subject constructions, we can predict what the syntax will be like when they do (cf. Nunberg et al 1994).

Moreover, even the internal arguments—the accusatives—are often quite restricted in nature. Jónsson (1997–1998, 31), for example, points out that *fylla* ‘fill’ can only be used with an accusative subject if that subject is ‘boat’ or ‘ship’, even though the transitive use of *fylla* ‘fill’ has no such restriction. What this suggests is that accusative subject constructions (of the relevant type) are, semantically, ‘idiomatically combining expressions’, in the sense of Nunberg et al 1994. As such, the verb meaning seems to be idiosyncratic and the internal argument is constrained; this is not surprising if the semantics requires that the overall construction

denotes an event whose agent is the underspecified agent in charge of the weather.

So far, we have seen evidence from German that ordinary verbs with a weather pronoun for an external argument have special semantics. Further support for the view that weather pronouns are thematic arguments of weather verbs, and not expletives, comes from weather constructions such as in (37), which take a subject *hann* ‘he’.

- (37) a. Hann er farinn að rigna.
he.NOM is gone.NOM.M.SG to rain
‘It has started raining.’
- b. Er hann farinn að rigna?
is he.NOM gone.NOM.M.SG to rain
‘Has it started raining?’
- (38) a. Það er farið að rigna.
EXPL is gone to rain
‘It has started raining.’
- b. Er (*það) farið að rigna?
is EXPL gone.DFLT to rain
‘Has it started raining?’

The *hann* ‘he’ in (37) is a kind of weather pronoun which some speakers can use.²⁸ It differs from ordinary weather pronouns semantically, and according to Thráinsson (1979, 252), “is perhaps to be understood as referential (referring to the weather god or whoever it is that governs the weather).” This description indicates that different weather pronouns can have slightly different semantics, which in turn indicates that weather verbs may take thematic external arguments. Note that unlike the first-position expletive *það* in (38) (see also (36a)), weather *hann* ‘he’ is retained in non-initial contexts like yes-no questions, as shown in (37b); weather *hann* ‘he’ may also trigger non-default participle agreement, as shown by the contrast between *farinn* ‘gone’ in (37) and *farið* ‘gone’ in (38).²⁹

²⁸It has fallen out of use for many speakers. Somewhat surprisingly, Smári (1920, 24–25) reported that weather *hann* ‘he’ was more frequent than the expletive *það* in colloquial speech which, if true, means that weather *hann* must have fallen out of colloquial use rather quickly.

²⁹As discussed further below, there is reason to think that *farið* ‘gone’ in this case is not a default form, but is rather a 3rd singular neuter form, agreeing with the silent weather pronoun or (null or overt) *það*, the latter of which is also the word for the 3rd person singular neuter pronoun ‘it’; *farinn* ‘gone’ is clearly agreeing with *hann*

The existence of weather *hann* ‘he’ bears on another issue. The present analysis is that Icelandic accusative subject constructions involve an external argument with the syntax of a clitic and the semantics of a weather pronoun. Because the external argument is a clitic, the accusative object can move past it to the subject position. As pointed out by Schäfer (2012, 253), this predicts that when Icelandic weather verbs take internal argument DPs, those DPs should move to the subject position. This prediction is born out, as shown by the sentences in (39), supporting the view that the syntax of FAs is just a special case of the syntax of weather verbs.

- (39) a. Meðan sprengjunum rignir yfir Afganistan...
 while explosions.the.DAT rain over Afghanistan...
 ‘While explosions rain over Afghanistan...’³⁰
- b. Gullinu hafði rignt til jarðar.
 gold.the.DAT had rained to earth
 ‘It rained gold down to earth.’ (H. Sigurðsson, 1989, 285)

According to H. Sigurðsson (1989), the dative in (39b) is an internal argument that has moved to the subject position. According to the present view, then, if weather *hann* ‘he’ occurs in a weather verb construction, the dative should not be able to raise to the subject position, because weather *hann* ‘he’ is not a clitic and would not be expected to allow A-movement past it. Sentences like (40) verify that this prediction is correct.

- (40) þótt hann rigni eldi og brennisteini.
 though he rains.SBJV fire.DAT and brimstone.DAT
 ‘(Even) if he rained fire and brimstone.’ (Halldór Sigurðsson p.c.)

The alternation between sentences like (40) and sentences like (39) involves the question of whether a ‘low’ DP argument can move to the subject position.

One might be tempted to suspect that something has gone wrong with the reasoning here, because we have switched from discussing accusative subjects to dative subjects. However, it can be shown that this difference is not at issue: we see FA-like effects with certain dative

‘he’, however.

³⁰<http://mbl.is/greinasafn/grein/632067/>

arguments, and weather verbs with accusative arguments. The first case is illustrated by (41).³¹

- (41) a. [☾] Hann kyngir niður snjónum.
 he.NOM swallows down snow.the.DAT
 ‘The snow pours down.’
 b. Snjónum kyngdi niður.
 snow.the.DAT swallowed down
 ‘The snow poured down.’

Here, we see a FA-like effect with a dative argument. That is, we have an ordinary verb, *kyngja* ‘swallow’, which (when combined with the particle *niður* ‘down’) gets weather verb syntax (either with weather *hann* ‘he’ or with the posited null clitic external argument) and thus a special meaning of the overall event. That is, despite being headed by the verb *kyngja* ‘swallow’, the event described has nothing to do with ‘swallowing’ per se.

Moreover, we also find weather verbs that can take an internal argument with accusative case. Note also the similarity between (42b) and (42c).³²

- (42) a. Það fennti allan daginn.
 EXPL snowed all day
 ‘It snowed all day.’
 b. Hrútana fennti inni.
 rams.the.ACC snowed in
 ‘The rams got covered with snow.’
 c. Hrútana flæddi í hólmanum.
 rams.the.ACC flooded in islet.the
 ‘The rams were caught by the flood-tide in the islet.’

(Adapted from Andrews 1982, 461)

- d. Mig rigndi bókstaflega niður.
 me.ACC rained literally down
 ‘The rain soaked me.’ (Halldór Sigurðsson p.c.)
 e. Mig snjóaði inni.
 me.ACC snowed in
 ‘I got snowed in.’ (Halldór Sigurðsson p.c.)

³¹(41a) was taken from the online dictionary at <http://snara.is>. It is marked with the moon symbol because speakers I have consulted find it to be archaic or highly marked in the modern language. This does not affect the point regarding (41b), however.

³²I thank a reviewer for constructing more natural-sounding versions of (42b) and (42c).

The alternation between dative and accusative on Icelandic internal arguments is a general one, that goes far beyond the scope of this paper (Maling 2002; Svenonius 2002; H. Sigurðsson 2012; Jónsson 2012, 2013; see Wood 2015, 128–138 for an overview). What is clear from previous research is that the alternation is fairly systematic, and usually correlates with distinct semantics on the verb in some way (though the semantic distinction can be quite subtle; see Jónsson 2012 for some discussion). What is important to the present point is that if weather verbs have thematic external arguments, then the alternation between accusative and dative on the subjects of weather verb constructions is just a special case of the general alternation between accusative and dative internal arguments. The only thing that is special is that the external argument of weather constructions allows the accusative/dative internal argument to move into the subject position. This analysis extends directly to FAs, and other accusative subject verbs, which have the syntax of weather verb constructions.

In sum, we have independent evidence (in particular from German) that FA semantics correlates with weather verb syntax, and independent support (from weather *hann* ‘he’) for the view that the external argument of weather verbs is a thematically interpreted external argument, and not just an expletive. We can thus say that the propositions in (29b–c) are supported by the facts, as is necessary for the present account to go through.

6. Clitics and A-movement

In the previous subsections, I have outlined support for (29a–c), but nothing there distinguished the present account from its nearest relatives; indeed, much of the discussion in the previous sections could be read as offering additional support for any of the accounts in Haider (2001), Platzack (2006), and Schäfer (2008, 2012). What distinguishes the accounts from the present account, I believe, lies in the analysis of how the accusative moves to the subject position. Haider (2001), Platzack (2006), and Schäfer (2008) all propose, in agreement with the present account, that FAs involve a silent, thematic external argument. But until Schäfer (2012), however, none of these accounts had an analysis of why an accusative object could move past this argument.

It is important to understand that the silence of the external argument is not enough, as shown by the ‘Impersonal Modal Construction’ (IMC) (Ottósson 1989, H. Sigurðsson 1989,

163ff., 234ff., H. Sigurðsson and Egerland 2009, E. Sigurðsson 2014). In the IMC, an impersonal subject is null and the direct object, when present, is marked with the same object case as in ordinary, non-impersonal transitive sentences. This construction is licensed by the modals *verða* ‘must/have to’, *þurfa* ‘need to/be necessary to’, *eiga* ‘be supposed to’ and *mega* ‘may’ (H. Sigurðsson and Egerland, 2009, 168).³³

- (43) a. Fundinn verður ___ að auglýsa vel.
meeting.the.ACC must ___ to advertise well
‘The meeting, one needs to advertise well.’ (Ottósson, 1989, 64)
- b. Það verður ___ að auglýsa fundinn vel.
EXPL must ___ to advertise meeting.the.ACC well
‘One needs to advertise the meeting well.’
- c. Hér verður { *fundinn } að auglýsa { fundinn } vel.
here must { *meeting.the.ACC } to advertise { meeting.the.ACC } well
‘Here, one needs to advertise the meeting well.’

As shown most clearly in (43c), the accusative argument of the IMC may not occupy the subject position, presumably due to the presence of a null argument in that position. This is different from the FA construction, where the accusative must occupy the subject position:

- (44) a. Hefur { bátinn } rekið { *bátinn } að landi?
has { boat.the.ACC } driven { *boat.the.ACC } to land
‘Has the boat drifted ashore?’ (Fate Accusative)
- b. Þarf { *bátinn } að mála { bátinn } strax?
need { *boat.the.ACC } to paint { boat.the.ACC } immediately
‘Does one need to paint the boat immediately?’ (IMC)

There is a semantic difference between the two sentences, in that the null subject in (44b) is understood as [+HUMAN] (H. Sigurðsson and Egerland, 2009), whereas the null subject in (44a) cannot be so construed. But what is important for present purposes is that one cannot assume that the movement of the accusative past the external argument is simply a result of the phonetic silence of the external argument (cf. Schäfer 2012, 252–253). The null argument in (44b) is sufficient for whatever underlies EPP effects (see H. Sigurðsson 2010). If a thematic null argument is present in both cases, why can the null subject in (44b) occupy the subject position (preventing the accusative from moving there), whereas the one in (44a) cannot?

³³Some other modals are possible in formal registers.

- In the following subsections, I will outline exactly what syntactic properties we must attribute to this clitic, and in so doing, I will show that there are facts that cannot be readily accounted for by the account in Schäfer 2012, but can be accounted for under the view that the silent weather pronoun in Icelandic is a clitic.

Recall that if we assume that accusative subject constructions involve a clitic external argument, it must be the case that the accusative internal argument is able to move past the clitic. In fact, this is an independently motivated property of argument clitics, which have the property that they sometimes allow A-movement past them, even when full DP arguments originating in the same position do not. In Chomsky (1995, 305), it is proposed that cliticization of French experiencer arguments, as in (47b), may license otherwise illicit A-movement of an embedded infinitival subject to the matrix subject position, as in (47a) (see also McGinnis 1998, 174ff. and Anagnostopoulou 2003):

- (47) a. * Jean_i semble à Marie [⟨Jean⟩_i avoir du talent]
 Jean seems to Marie to.have talent
- b. Jean_i lui_j semble ⟨lui⟩_j [⟨Jean⟩_i avoir du talent]
 Jean her.DAT.CL seems to.have talent
 ‘John seems to her to have talent.’ (French)

As mentioned in note 79 in Chomsky (1995, 388), the French facts are more complicated than (47) alone indicates. However, it is certainly the case that clitics do not distribute like full DPs, and they at least sometimes allow full DPs to move past them.

For Icelandic, it has been proposed that certain anticausatives are derived by moving an *-st* clitic from the external argument position to cliticize onto the verb (Eythórsson 1995, 241–242; H. Sigurðsson 2012, 217, fn.38; Wood 2012, 2015, chs.2–3). The *-st* clitic allows the internal argument to move past it to the subject position.

- (48) a. Ég opnaði hurðina.
I.NOM opened door.the.ACC
'I opened the door.'
- b. Hurðin opnaðist.
door.the.NOM opened-ST
'The door opened.'
- c. [TP the door T [VoiceP CL-_{ST} Voice [opened ⟨the door⟩]]]
↑

The facts in (44) are accounted for if the null external argument of accusative subject constructions distributes like a clitic whereas the null external argument of the IMC distributes like a full DP. We already know that null elements can be nominative and condition accusative case, and that DPs can A-move past clitics; all the present analysis requires us to say is that null arguments can bear case and distribute like clitics.^{34,35}

An anonymous reviewer objects that I have not shown any cases where an overt nominative clitic allows a DP internal argument to cross it. In both of the cases discussed above, the DP crossing the clitic is nominative, in an Agree relation with Tense. The clitic itself is either dative (as in the French example) or caseless (as in the Icelandic example). While I agree that it would be strong support for the present analysis if such a case emerged, I would argue that it is not necessary, for the following reason: there is nothing in the theory that should, or even can, rule out an accusative crossing a nominative clitic; case marking simply does not play the kind of role in grammar that can rule this out.

³⁴See also van Oostendorp (2012), who provides prosodic evidence for segmentally null clitics in Greek. Kayne (2008, 2009, 2010) proposes, from a different perspective, that argument clitics can be and often are silent.

³⁵Note also that unlike the null clitic under discussion, the *-st* clitic bears no case and cannot condition accusative case on the internal argument. See Wood (2015) for more details on why this is so.

As is well known, Icelandic subjecthood is dissociated from case marking and agreement. Agreement is with whatever nominative DP is close enough to T to serve as the latter's goal, and subjecthood arises by virtue of the closest DP to T—regardless of case-marking—moving to SpecTP. The DP crossing the *-st* clitic, for example, does not have to be nominative; it can be accusative, dative, or genitive, depending on the structural context that DP originally merged in.³⁶ Consider the examples in (49) and (50), taken from H. Sigurðsson (1996, 29). (See H. Sigurðsson (2012) for a thorough discussion of these facts.)

- (49) a. Hafði Ólafur_i virst [t_i vera gáfaður]?
had Ólafur.NOM seemed [t_i be intelligent]
'Did Ólafur seem intelligent?'
- b. *Hafði virst [Ólafur vera gáfaður]?
had seemed [Ólafur.NOM be intelligent]
- (50) a. Hafði þeim virst [Ólafur vera gáfaður]?
had them.DAT seemed [Ólafur.NOM be intelligent]
'Did it seem to them that Ólafur was intelligent?'
- b. *Hafði Ólafur_i þeim virst [t_i vera gáfaður]?
had Ólafur.NOM them.DAT seemed [t_i be intelligent]
- c. *Hafði Ólafur_i virst þeim [t_i vera gáfaður]?
had Ólafur.NOM seemed them.DAT [t_i be intelligent]
- d. *Hafði þeim Ólafur_i virst [t_i vera gáfaður]?
had them.DAT Ólafur.NOM seemed [t_i be intelligent]

In the examples in (49), the raising verb *virðast* 'seem' introduces no dative experiencer and the embedded nominative must move to the subject position. In the examples in (50), however, *virðast* 'seem' introduces a dative experiencer DP, and this prevents the nominative of the lower clause from moving to the subject position; only the dative can do so, and it in fact must do so. Here we see clear evidence that it is structural closeness, rather than case marking, that decides whether a DP can move to the subject position.

³⁶See the sentence in (19b) for an example of a dative crossing the *-st* clitic. Of course, *-st*-marked verbs normally do not take accusative subjects, as discussed above. However, when a raising verb marked with the *-st* clitic, such as *virðast* 'seem', embeds a verb phrase with an accusative subject, we can see that an accusative DP has no problem A-moving past the *-st* clitic.

What Icelandic has shown is that the principles of case-marking are distinct from the principles of DP licensing, even if they overlap in some cases. This has led various researchers to propose that case is assigned post-syntactically (Marantz, 1991/2000; McFadden, 2004; H. Sigurðsson, 2012). If case is determined post-syntactically, then there is no way that nominative case on a clitic can be invoked to prevent syntactic movement past it. Even if one does not adopt the specific theoretical mechanisms of the above-cited authors, there is no way to appeal to nominative case-marking on a clitic to prevent syntactic movement past it. I have shown that structural accusatives can move to the subject position; I have shown that DPs can move past case-marked clitics, and clitics originating in the external argument position; there exist, as far as I know, no coherent account of these facts that would predict a nominative external argument clitic to behave any differently. Any theory providing nominative DPs with special A-movement properties will necessarily make the wrong predictions. Any theory ruling out structural accusatives in the subject position will make the wrong predictions. Since I know of no descriptively adequate account of Icelandic case-marking and A-movement that would predict a nominative case feature on an external argument clitic to have an effect on A-movement, I conclude that attributing clitic status to the null external argument makes the correct predictions, regardless of the case features that clitic must be assumed to have.³⁷

6.2 Clitics and participial agreement

The final evidence in favor of a clitic analysis will stem from the peculiar behavior of accusative subjects with respect to participial agreement. Passive participles, in Icelandic, agree in case, number and gender with structurally case-marked DPs (examples adapted from H. Sigurðsson 2008), but not with oblique-case marked DPs, as illustrated in (51)–(52).

- (51) a. **Hún** var { *aðstoðað / aðstoðuð }.
 she.NOM was { *assisted.DFLT / assisted.F.SG.NOM }
 ‘She was assisted.’

³⁷Although German is often said not to mark subjecthood configurationally in the way that Icelandic does, it is intriguing that Weiß (2015) describes German dialects with cliticized subject pronouns, in the presence of which the unmarked order has the direct object preceding the subject, regardless of case. Whether this ultimately supports the present analysis or is irrelevant, however, remains to be seen.

- b. **Henni** var { **hjálpað** / *hjálpuð / *hjálpaðri }.
her.DAT was { helped.DFLT / *helped.F.SG.NOM / *helped.F.SG.DAT }
'She was helped.'
- (52) a. Ég taldi **hana** hafa verið { *aðstoðað / **aðstoðaða** }.
I believed her.ACC have been { *assisted.DFLT / assisted.F.SG.ACC }
'I believed her to have been assisted.'
- b. Ég taldi **henni** hafa verið { **hjálpað** / *hjálpaðri }.
I believed her.DAT have been { helped.DFLT / *helped.F.SG.DAT }
'I believed her to have been helped.'

In (51a), we see a nominative subject agreeing with a passive participle. In (52a), we see a structurally case-marked accusative in an ECM position triggering agreement on the passive participle. In (51b) and (52b), we see that an oblique (dative) DP cannot trigger agreement with the participle. Instead, the participle shows up in the 'default' form, which happens to be identical to the 3rd person singular neuter nominative/accusative. (In the neuter singular, nominative and accusative are syncretic.)

Two crucial properties of participle agreement must be taken into account. First, the DP triggering agreement need not be a thematic argument of the participle. This is demonstrated in (53). In (53a), we see that *hana* 'her.ACC' triggers agreement with the passive participle of the ECM verb *telja* 'believe', even though it is not a thematic argument of that verb. In (53b), we see that *hún* 'she.NOM' triggers agreement with the passive participles of the ECM verbs *álíta* 'consider' and *telja* 'believe', even though it is a thematic argument of neither.

- (53) a. Ég álít **hana** vera **talda** hafa verið ríka.
I consider her.ACC be believed.F.SG.ACC have been rich
'I think she is believed to have been rich.'
- b. **Hún** er **álitin** vera **talin** vera rík.
she.NOM is considered.F.SG.NOM be believed.F.SG.NOM be rich
'She is considered to be believed to be rich.'

(*Thráinsson, 2007*, 438)

The second factor to take into account is that in order for a DP to trigger participle agreement, it need not move to the left of the participle. This is illustrated by the sentences in (54), where (54a) shows an in situ nominative theme triggering agreement on a participle to its left and

(54b) shows an in situ accusative theme (in an ECM construction) triggering agreement on a participle to its left.

- (54) a. Það mundu þá sennilega ekki verða **seldir** **einhverjir**
 there would then probably not be sold.M.PL.NOM some
bátar á uppboðinu.
 boats.M.NOM at auction.the
 ‘Boats would then probably not be sold at the auction.’
- b. Ég taldi hafa verið **selda** **einhverja báta** á uppboðinu.
 I believed have been sold.M.PL.ACC some boats.M.ACC at auction.the
 ‘I believed some boats to have been sold at the auction.’

(H. Sigurðsson, 2003, 253–254)

The generalization is that participles agree with non-inherently case-marked DPs that they c-command (prior to movement). In the presence of an inherently case-marked DP (such as the dative in (51b) and (52b)), the participle shows up in the ‘default’ form.

With this in mind, we can ask what kind of participles we would expect to find with accusative subject constructions. In an analysis such as the present one, or Haider 2001, Schäfer 2008, 2012, or H. Sigurðsson 2011, 2012—any analysis where the accusative is the same, structural accusative that we find in examples like (54b)—we would expect to find participle agreement, not default agreement. However, while participle agreement is attested on occasion, what we usually find is something that looks like default agreement. I will propose that what we really have is agreement with the silent external argument.³⁸

Consider the following data, reported by Andrews (1982). In (55), the verb *elska* ‘love’ does not take an accusative subject; *drengina* ‘the boy’ is accusative solely because of its presence in the ECM construction. In (56), the verb *vanta* ‘lack’ normally does take an accusative subject; we would expect *drengina* ‘the boy’ to be accusative regardless of whether it is embedded in an ECM construction or not. What we are interested in presently is what form the participle takes in each case.

³⁸Thus, I am not proposing that there are two ways to get default agreement, as a reviewer suggested. We already need two ways to get 3rd person singular neuter agreement: by default agreement, or by agreeing with something that has 3rd person singular neuter phi-features. My suggestion is that the latter is what we are seeing with accusative subject constructions.

- (55) a. *Þeir* *segja* ***drengina*** *vera* ***talda*** *elska* *stúlkurnar*.
 they.NOM say the.boy.M.SG.ACC be believed.M.SG.ACC love the.girls
 ‘They say the boy to be believed to love the girls.’
- b. **Þeir* *segja* ***drengina*** *vera* ***talið*** *elska* *stúlkurnar*.
 they.NOM say the.boy.M.SG.ACC be believed.DFLT love the.girls
- (56) a. %*Þeir* *segja* ***drengina*** *vera* ***talda*** *vanta* *peninga*.
 they.NOM say the.boyM.SG.ACC be believed.M.SG.ACC lack money
 ‘They say the boy to be believed to lack money.’
- b. *Þeir* *segja* ***drengina*** *vera* ***talið*** *vanta* *peninga*.
 they.NOM say the.boyM.SG.ACC be believed.DFLT lack money
 ‘They say the boy to be believed to lack money.’

(Andrews, 1982, 469)

According to Andrews (1982, 469), the speakers he consulted rejected (55b) straightforwardly, but were “not so clear about the impossibility of agreeing *talda* in [56a].” If the accusative subject of *vanta* ‘lack’ is an inherent/lexical accusative, this is surprising; we expect (56a) to be unacceptable just as *hjálpaðri* ‘helped.DAT’ in (52b) is unacceptable. He suggested that the explanation may lie in processing considerations.

On encountering *talda* in [56a], one does not yet know that the accusative on *drengina* [‘the boy’] is irregular, and since it is more likely to be regular, it seems legitimate to simply assume that it is, and agree. (Andrews, 1982, 469)

The idea is that speakers are generally expecting an accusative DP in an ECM position to be ordinary, structural accusative, which is almost certainly going to be true the majority of the time. This expectation leads some speakers to judge (56a) as acceptable, even if their internal grammars should not be assumed to generate such a sentence.

One might be dubious that this is the whole story, however. First of all, such an explanation would be natural to explain online processing effects that treated (56a) as grammatical; it would not be surprising, for example, if a reading time study found no difference between (56a) and (55a). It is not quite as obvious, however, why some speakers would continue to be unsure even after reflecting on the sentence. Second of all, one can find attested examples of an accusative subject that is not in an ECM position, but nevertheless triggers agreement on the participle.

The example in (57) was found on the MÍM tagged corpus.³⁹

- (57) Það er nú eitt af því góða við jólin að
 that is now one of the good about Christmas that
- þá er **daginn** **farinn** að lengja aftur :)
 then is day.the.M.SG.ACC gone.M.SG.ACC to lengthen again
 ‘Now that’s one good thing about Christmas, then the day starts getting longer again.’

In this sentence, *daginn* ‘the day’ is the accusative-subject argument of the verb *lengja*. There is nothing in this sentence that would lead its author to mistakenly think s/he was dealing with a structural accusative object—it is unambiguously in the subject position—and yet the aspectual participle agrees as though the accusative were an ordinary, structurally case-marked DP.⁴⁰

Now, the point of this section will not hinge on whether our analysis of accusative subjects has to generate sentences like (56a) or (57).⁴¹ The fact that absolutely must be part of any account of accusative subjects is that in the general case, i.e. (56b), the participle does NOT agree with such subjects, and instead appears to take on the default form—or, as I will suggest, the 3rd person singular neuter form. From the perspective of any analysis that treats the accusative of accusative subjects as the same, structurally assigned case as the accusative of accusative objects, one would not automatically expect the contrast between (55) and (56).

Note, moreover, that the participle (non)agreement facts are recursive.⁴² Consider, especially, (58b), where we see a non-agreeing, default form on both participles.

- (58) a. **Hún** er **talin** vera **sögð** vera vinsæl.
 she.NOM is believed.F.SG.NOM be said.F.SG.NOM be popular
 ‘She is believed to be said to be popular.’ (Andrews, 1982, 445)
- b. **Daginn** er **talið** vera **farið** að lengja.
 day.the.ACC is believed.DFLT be gone.DFLT to lengthen
 ‘The day is believed to have started to get longer.’

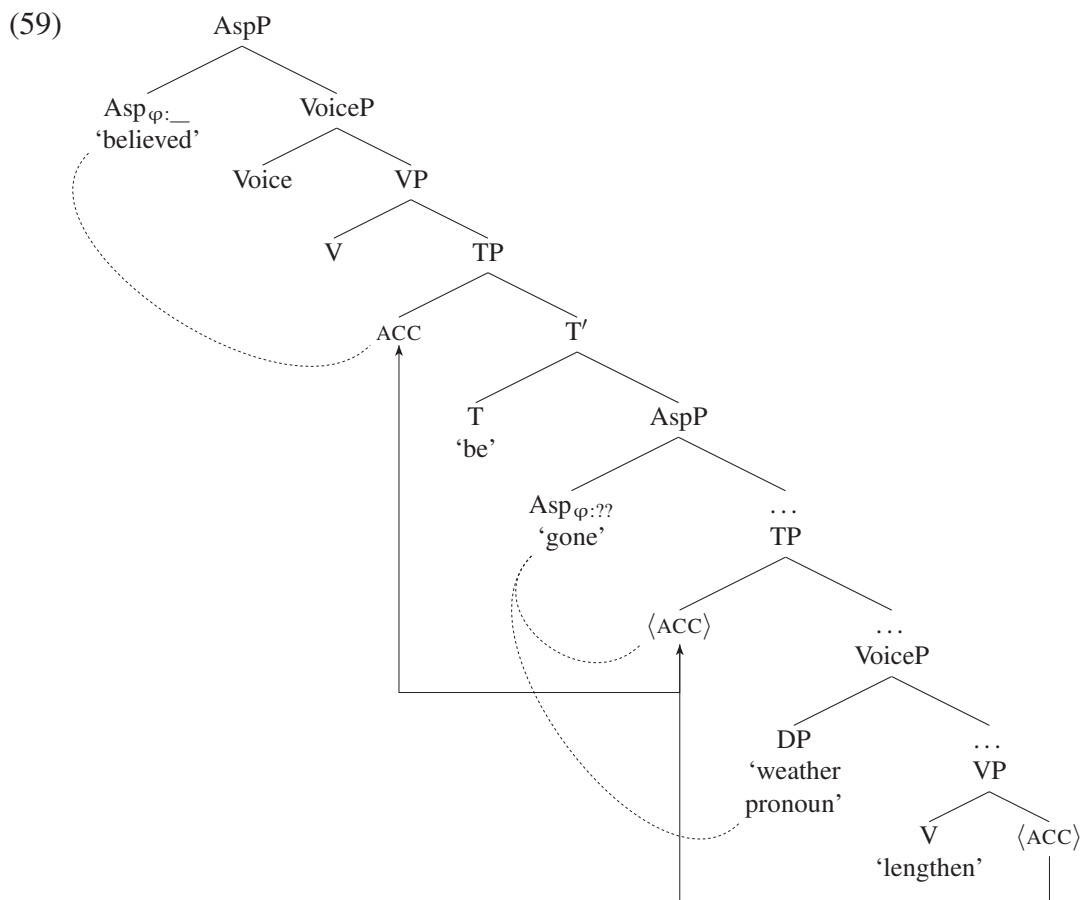
³⁹The MÍM tagged corpus is freely available and searchable on <http://mim.hi.is>. See Helgadóttir et al (2012) for discussion.

⁴⁰A reviewer points out that examples with plural subjects are not found, an observation that I have to set aside for a future investigation.

⁴¹I will show below, however, how these data can be accommodated under the present analysis.

⁴²Thanks to Einar Freyr Sigurðsson and Hlíf Árnadóttir for discussion of (58b).

Let us assume that participle agreement is triggered by an Asp head above Voice with unvalued phi-features. According to previous accounts that analyze accusative subjects as structurally case marked (e.g. Haider 2001; Schäfer 2008, 2012; H. Sigurðsson 2006, 2011, 2012), there is no mechanism to ensure that the accusative is available for A-movement but not available for participle agreement. Consider (58b). By the time the higher participle *talið* ‘believed’ is present in the structure, the accusative will have already A-moved past the silent weather pronoun into two A-positions that c-command that pronoun:⁴³



First, the weather pronoun will condition accusative case on the internal argument of *lengja* ‘lengthen’, and then the accusative DP will move around it to the SpecTP of that infinitive clause. So far, so good. But then, the higher participle will be probing downward to agree with a goal. Why would it not agree with the accusative DP? The issue is even more severe at the next level, where the accusative, after failing to agree with the participle for whatever reason,

⁴³H. Sigurðsson (2010) argues against A-movement through intermediate SpecTP positions (and against specifiers more generally, in favor of tucking in). However, note that in his (2012) account of accusative subjects, there is no external argument that could block participle agreement, so a separate account would still be required.

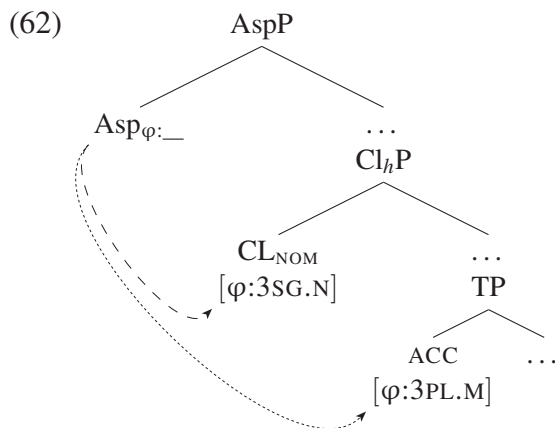
moves to the next highest SpecTP. There, once again, we would expect it to be in a configuration where it could agree with the higher participle ‘believed’.

I will not review here every imaginable way we could tweak our assumptions to try to account for the participle agreement facts while leaving the weather pronoun in its base generated position; no simple solution seems to present itself. In the present analysis, however, a rather simple solution does present itself. I have already suggested that the basic facts of accusative subject constructions can be accounted for if we assume a silent external argument with the semantics of a weather pronoun and the syntax of a clitic. At this point, assuming such a clitic offers a straightforward analysis: the clitic undergoes clitic climbing at each level, and agrees with each participle along the way.

To be more explicit about how this might work, Wood (2015), following Cardinaletti and Shlonsky (2004), proposes that the clause contains at least two clitic licensing positions: a high position just above TP, and a low position just above VoiceP. In the derivation of a sentence like (60), the structure of AspP would be as in (61). An abridged version of the generally relevant configuration is given in (62).

- (60) Bátana er talið hafa brotið í spón.
boats.the.ACC are believed have broken in pieces
‘The boats are believed to have broken to pieces.’ (Zaenen and Maling, 1990, 145)

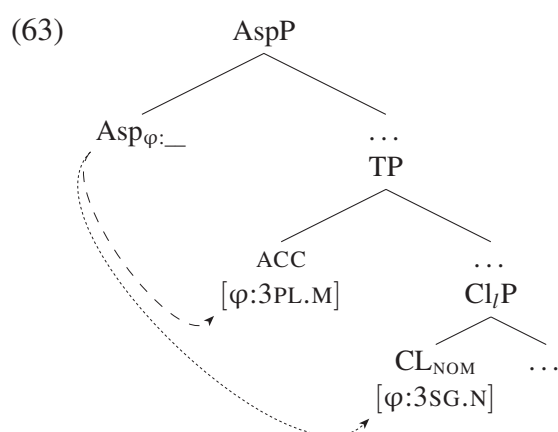
- (61) [AspP Asp_[φ:___] [CIP CL_[3SG.N] [VoiceP ... [CIP ⟨CL⟩ [TP ACC [CIP ⟨CL⟩ [VoiceP ⟨CL⟩ ⟨ACC⟩



When Asp probes, the closest goal will be the clitic, which we can assume is 3rd person singular neuter, just like the Icelandic expletive *það* and weather pronouns in many Germanic

languages.⁴⁴ The result is that the participle would end up in the “default” form: 3rd person singular neuter. What is necessary for this account to go through is that the clitic must be able to stay one step ahead of the accusative DP, and exactly this is a well known property of clitic climbing constructions cross-linguistically.

Finally, the present account offers a way to understand the marked alternates in (56a) and (57). Some speakers might be inclined to accept and/or produce agreeing participles precisely because there is nothing unusual about the accusative case on such DPs. Under a processing account of such phenomena, it would be understandable that speakers might react in this way to a structure whose crucial properties (i.e. a null clitic) are not overtly detectable. Under a syntactic account, we could simply say that some speakers, perhaps as a marked option, allow the silent clitic to remain in a lower position rather than climb; this kind of variation is also attested among robustly well-studied clitic languages (see e.g. Tortora 2002).



In sum, a clitic analysis of accusative subject constructions offers a ready explanation for why accusative subjects usually do not trigger participle agreement. It is the clitic, rather than the accusative DP, that agrees with the participle. The properties we need to attribute to the clitic are not costly: it needs to have case features, it needs to be able to climb, and it needs to be able to trigger participle agreement. All are well-attested properties of clitics.

⁴⁴As mentioned earlier, we could also assume with Schäfer (2012) that the clitic has a number feature, but no person or gender features.

7. Why Accusative Subjects Are Special

Accusative subjects have a special status in Icelandic that distinguishes them from other oblique subject constructions. On the one hand, the verbs that appear to select them are quite idiosyncratic in their semantics. On the other hand, they are too well attested and diachronically stable to dismiss. It is instructive to consider how they have been treated analytically, as compared to dative subjects. [H. Sigurðsson \(2012\)](#), for example, argues that many dative subjects are licensed by an Appl head that is responsible for their thematic interpretation. The interpretations needed fit with general proposals about Appl heads (goals, experiencers, etc.), and the proposal has independent motivation cross-linguistically. [H. Sigurðsson \(2012\)](#) analyzes accusative subjects, however, as stemming from more exotic functional heads, such as Voice_{FATE} and Voice_{PSYCH}, whose presence has not figured in cross-linguistic analyses of argument structure alternations. Similarly, it has become common parlance in work within the Minimalist Program to talk about a special, dative-introducing experiencer v^* head to account for dative subject constructions, but no such similar proposal has been made for accusative subjects. [Jónsson \(2003, 2013\)](#) has argued for a distinction between ‘inherent’ case and ‘lexical’ case, the former being characterizable in terms of fairly clear thematic roles (such as dative experiencers or goals), and the latter not being characterizable in terms of anything resembling clear thematic roles. He argues that accusative subjects are always lexical case, and thus selected in a fully unpredictable way by individual lexical verbs.

The present study offers a different angle on why accusative subject constructions are special: in essence, they require not only more structure than dative subject constructions (many of which require only one Appl head), but they also require structure with peculiar properties. That is, we take the case marking and the verbal morphology (the ASG) at face value: accusative subject constructions are semantically, syntactically, and morphologically transitive. What is unusual is just the external argument: its form, as a null clitic, allows the object to move to the subject position; its interpretation, as a weather pronoun, can lead to idiosyncratic interpretive contributions of the verbal root and other restrictions of the event structure.

Most of the present paper has focused on Fate Accusatives, which are the cases where, it seems to me, the presence of a silent external argument is best motivated. (It is therefore no

accident that they have been the focus of previous studies proposing a syntactic account of accusative subjects as well.) We do see cases where accusative experiencer subjects alternate with a transitive form, as in (64),⁴⁵ but also cases such as those in (65) which do not correspond to any transitive verb with a nominative subject. Some experiencer accusatives, in fact, take an accusative object in addition to the accusative subject.

- (64) a. *María kitlaði mig.*
 Mary.NOM tickled me.ACC
 ‘Mary tickled me.’
- b. *Mig kitlaði.*
 me.ACC tickled
 ‘I felt tickled/tickling.’ (H. Sigurðsson, 1989, 217)
- (65) a. *Mig vantar hníf.*
 me.ACC needs knife.ACC
 ‘I need a knife.’ (Jónsson and Eythórsson, 2005, 224)
- b. *Mig dreymdi draum.*
 me.ACC dreamt dream.ACC
 ‘I dreamt a dream.’ (Barðdal, 2011, 63)

However, for the explanation of the ASG proposed here to have full explanatory force, it would seem to be necessary to extend the analysis to all accusative subject constructions in the language. If we do not include, say, experiencer accusatives, then we are left without an explanation of why the ASG should apply to them as well. So accepting that the present analysis more or less forces me into this position, we can ask if it is plausible to adopt it, or if there are any major drawbacks to adopting it.

In fact, there is one strong empirical payoff for assuming that the present account extends to experiencer accusatives: it explains the nearly complete absence of ACC-NOM verbs (Yip et al, 1987). Generally, when the subject is accusative and there is an overt DP object, that object is also accusative.⁴⁶ In contrast, when the subject is dative and there is an overt DP object, that

⁴⁵A reviewer points out that the German counterpart of (64b) would require an expletive, which, it seems, would offer clear support for extending the present analysis at least to sentences of this sort.

⁴⁶The exceptional cases of ACC-NOM verbs are no more than three in number; all of them are archaic, almost frozen, and allow the nominative to be the subject as well. Yip et al (1987) note one possible accusative-nominative expression, *mig sækir syfja* ‘me.ACC seeks sleepiness.NOM’, which means ‘I am getting sleepy’. However, Halldór

object is generally nominative. The lack of ACC-NOM verbs, as opposed to DAT-NOM verbs and ACC-ACC verbs, is surprising if accusative is an inherent/quirky case. For DAT-NOM, the facts essentially force the position that the nominative is the ‘elsewhere’ case, as predicted by dependent case theory.⁴⁷ If accusative can be an inherent case, why wouldn’t we see ACC-NOM constructions, where accusative is lexically assigned to the subject and the other gets the elsewhere case, just like DAT-NOM constructions?⁴⁸

The absence of ACC-NOM constructions in favor of ACC-ACC constructions follows, however, if accusative subjects are just structurally case-marked dependent accusatives. Consider why. According to the present view, a DP is accusative when it is c-commanded by a higher, non-inherently case-marked DP. ACC-ACC constructions, then, involve two internal arguments (as originally proposed in H. Sigurðsson 1989), with a higher null clitic.

(66) [Case Domain ... $CL_{\alpha_{\text{Unmarked}}}$... $DP_{\beta_{\text{Unmarked}}}$... $DP_{\gamma_{\text{Unmarked}}}$...]

Assume that in (66), linear precedence indicates c-command. DP_{β} gets accusative case because it is c-commanded by CL_{α} . DP_{γ} will certainly get accusative case: not only is it c-commanded by CL_{α} , but it is also c-commanded by DP_{β} . Thus, the explanation of the ASG offered in this study forces us into a position where we get an automatic, fully principled explanation for the near absence of ACC-NOM constructions in favor of ACC-ACC constructions. In this way, experiencer accusatives are not a problem for the present account; on the contrary, they provide strong support for it.

In extending the account to experiencer accusatives, we should also return to our discussion of what the semantics of weather pronouns must be like. Schäfer (2008, 2012) adopts the view that they are referentially underspecified agents. Can the referentially underspecified agent in charge of the weather also be construed as being in charge of our psychological experiences?

Sigurðsson (p.c.) notes that it is a more or less frozen idiom (resisting many ordinary permutations) and not a generally productive configuration that verbs make use of (cf. H. Sigurðsson 1996, 24, fn.16). In fact, a reviewer points out that “*syfja* seems to be an inverted subject, subject to the definiteness effect: **mig sótti syfjan*” ‘me.ACC sought the.sleepiness.NOM’. So it is possible that even this ‘frozen’ example is not a true instance of an ACC-NOM construction.

⁴⁷See Wood and H. Sigurðsson (2014) for argumentation based on ‘let’-causatives.

⁴⁸Yip et al (1987) analyzed this situation by suggesting that the accusative of the subject spreads onto the object.

H. Sigurðsson (2006, 20–21), discusses his choice of the term ‘fate’ for Fate Accusatives: “the notion ‘fate’ may not be entirely satisfactory here [...] I therefore take the liberty of using the notion ‘fate’ as a cover term for forces that are not in human power.” Despite the fact that Sigurðsson adopted a separate notation for experiencer accusatives, we can still ask: Are human psychological experiences among the “forces that are not in human power?” Pesetsky (1995, 111) speculates, on independent grounds, that equating the external argument of weather predicates with that of psych predicates is not unreasonable.⁴⁹

In particular, one can easily imagine that the semantics of verbs like *s’etonner* [‘be amazed’] [...] view certain emotions as a type of ‘psychic weather.’ [...] Emotions like surprise, annoyance, and amusement are indeed like the weather in a number of respects. They are “global” (ambient), affecting one’s perceptions as well as actions. They are transitory. They are somewhat unpredictable in their onset, intensity, and duration. Most important for our purposes, the proximate cause of both weather and emotions can be viewed as a force of nature, beyond conscious control of the individual. All this might lead one to expect a range of Experiencer constructions that quite literally involve ambient *it* in languages like French and English.

(Pesetsky, 1995, 111)

In fact, in a footnote, Pesetsky (1995, 311) goes on to suggest that English sentences like (67) and Russian sentences like (68) are examples. As a reviewer points out, (68) has a direct parallel in Icelandic, which is shown in (69).

(67) It’s boring in here.

(68) Menja tošnit.
me.ACC nauseates.3SG
‘I am nauseated.’

(Pesetsky, 1995, 311) (Russian)

(69) Mig klígjar.
me.ACC nauseates

⁴⁹As a reviewer points out, Pesetsky argued that the reflexive clitic was a manifestation of the weather expletive argument. What is important for present purposes is the question of whether it is plausible to see psych-verbs as being related, structurally, to weather verbs. The quote below, I think, speaks very eloquently to the plausibility of this idea.

‘I am nauseated.’

(Icelandic)

Jónsson (2003, 135–136), moreover, argues that experiencers realized as nominative subjects are “generally more controllable” than those realized as non-nominative subjects, and refers to such experiencers as “agentive experiencers”.

It seems to me, then, that it is reasonable to suppose that Icelandic experiencer accusatives also involve an external argument of the same sort that is present in weather verb constructions. At the very least, given the underspecified nature of the external argument, there do not seem to be any major barriers to this assumption. Adopting it is not only semantically reasonable, but also allows us to explain both the ASG—a generalization about how verbal morphology is connected to the case marking of syntactic subjects—and the accusative case marking found on the objects of accusative subject constructions.

8. Conclusion

Empirically, accusative subject constructions are special. They are special semantically, in that they are often special interpretations of otherwise occurring verbs. They are special morphologically, in that only they are restricted to being arguments of morphologically transitive verbs (the ASG). They are special syntactically, in that when there is another object, that object is also accusative (in contrast to the nominative objects found in dative subject constructions). This specialness calls out for an explanation: any analysis that treats accusatives like datives is missing something.

If we say that accusative DPs are always dependent accusative, then we have one kind of explanation: accusative subjects are special in that they can only be derived through some special syntactic configuration. In the present case, I have proposed that what is special about the structure is that it contains a silent external argument with the syntactic distribution of an argument clitic and the semantic interpretation of a weather pronoun. From this assumption, a surprising array of facts about accusative subject constructions follows. The interaction of case-marking and A-movement revolves around two simple principles: A-movement applies to the closest DP (regardless of case marking), and accusative is assigned to any unmarked DP that is c-commanded by another unmarked DP.

The present study supports at least two general conclusions about how grammar must be organized. First, with respect to our theory of case, ‘structural case’ and ‘inherent/quirky case’ are not distinct types as far as DP licensing is concerned: structurally case marked DPs can still be required to A-move. Second, with respect to the theory of the lexicon, morphological idiosyncrasy and semantic idiosyncrasy are distinct in a way that is expected from the perspective of a ‘distributed lexicon’. Sometimes, the morphology tells us we have a ‘different word’ while the semantics tells us we have the ‘same word’. Other times, the morphology tells us we have the ‘same word’ while the semantics tells us that we have a ‘different word’. Verbs with accusative subjects are very often instances of the second case, which I have argued follows from the syntax of accusative subject constructions: such verbs are never morphologically intransitive precisely because they are syntactically transitive.

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