

# The Nom/Acc alternation in Germanic

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## 1 Introduction \*

In this paper I discuss the distribution of accusative case and the nature of the nominative / accusative distinction in the Germanic languages. In generative approaches (Chomsky 1981, Burzio 1986, etc.), three different kinds of accusatives have been generally assumed: Structural (object) accusatives, default accusatives, and other non-structural accusatives, as described with English examples in (1):

- |     |    |                                   |                          |
|-----|----|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| (1) | a. | She saw <b>me</b> .               | structural Acc           |
|     | b. | It is <b>me</b> .                 | default Acc              |
|     | c. | I arrived <b>the second day</b> . | other non-structural Acc |

The class ‘other non-structural Acc’ includes not only adverbial accusatives but also inherent accusatives.

I will here adopt a different view, arguing that there are basically only two accusative types: *Relational Acc*, and *Non-relational Acc*, where the notion ‘relational’ means dependent on the presence of a nominative DP. On this view, so-called default, predicative accusatives are a well-behaved subtype of Relational Acc. Many of the Germanic languages, however, apply nominative case-marking of predicative DPs. This *predicative Nom/Acc variation* is a central topic of this work.

In section 2, I discuss Burzio’s Generalization (BG) and describe accusative case-marking in the Germanic languages, concentrating on accusatives that are apparent or real exceptions to BG, in particular accusative subjects and the above mentioned predicative accusatives. Section 3 argues for a morphological, non-syntactic understanding of the relational (‘structural’) cases, where Nom is seen as simply the first, independent case, CASE1, and Acc as the second case, CASE2, dependent on Nom being present in the structure. Section 4 argues that this morphological understanding enables us to analyze the English type of predicative Acc as involving an extension of the general Nom/Acc distinction between *arguments* to *DPs*. In the concluding section 5, I suggest, on the basis of the presented facts and analysis, that we need to abandon the view that morpho(phono)logy is a straightforward reflection of syntax. Rather, we must see morphology and syntax as distinct ‘languages’ or codes, mutually understandable but *foreign* to each other. That is, morphology does not mirror or ‘show’ syntax, it *translates* it into its own ‘language’, which is radically different from the ‘language’ of Narrow Syntax (in the sense of Chomsky 2000 and subsequent works).

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## 2 The distribution of Nom/Acc across the Germanic languages

In this section, I will describe the distribution of accusative case and how it interacts with nominative case in the Germanic languages, mainly the standard ones. Three major domains will be considered. In 2.1, I discuss the relational or ‘structural’ cases in the sense of Burzio (1986) and the scope of his famous generalization. In 2.2., I discuss argumental and adverbial accusatives that do not fall under BG, above all certain Icelandic accusative subjects that have sometimes been considered to be mysterious and a major challenge to BG. Finally, in section 2.3, I describe the Germanic predicative Nom/Acc variation.

Sections 2.1 and 2.3 lay the foundations for the discussion in later sections, whereas section 2.2 is more of an intermezzo, a long detour I have been forced to make in order to be able to later proceed on the main road, so to speak. Many of the accusatives discussed in 2.2 are problematic and interesting, but those readers who are only interested in the predicative Nom/Acc variation might opt for taking a bypass more or less directly from section 2.1 to section 2.3.

The Germanic languages divide into (relatively) *case-rich* and *case-poor* languages, the former having (at least some) case-marking of full NPs, whereas the latter have Nom/Acc marking of only pronouns. In addition, the case-rich languages have morphological dative and genitive case (to a varying extent).

Case-rich:	Icelandic, Faroese, German, Yiddish
Case-poor:	Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, North Frisian, English, West Frisian, Dutch, Afrikaans

Many of the Germanic languages show considerable dialectal variation with respect to the distribution of nominative and accusative case. Thus, some Swedish and Norwegian varieties have partly neutralized the Nom/Acc distinction (see Eklund 1982, Holmberg 1986), while other Swedish and Norwegian varieties have retained even dative case (Reinhammer 1973), some German varieties have some instances of accusative instead of the general German type of nominative predicative DPs, and so on. Also, many varieties that are often referred to as dialects are more properly regarded as separate languages, from a linguistic point of view, including for instance the ‘Swedish’ Älvdalsmälet (see Levander 1909) and the ‘German’ Cimbrian in northernmost Italy (see Tyroller 2003). I will however largely limit the present study to the 12 above listed ‘standard languages’, only mentioning other varieties occasionally.

### 2.1 Germanic relational case-marking

All the standard Germanic languages show the core properties of accusative systems, assigning nominative to (non-quirky) subjects and accusative to most objects. This is illustrated below for three of the languages:

(2)	a.	<b>She</b> (/*Her) had seen <b>me</b> (/*I).	English	NOM ... ACC
	b.	<b>Hun</b> (/*Hende) havde set <b>mig</b> (/*jeg).	Danish	NOM ... ACC
	c.	<b>Hún</b> (/*Hana) hafði séð <b>mig</b> (/*ég).	Icelandic	NOM ... ACC

A basic (and a generally known) fact about the standard Germanic languages is that they all adhere to Burzio’s Generalization. The nontechnical version of BG is as follows (Burzio 1986: 178; for exceptions, see below and, e.g., Burzio 2000):

- (3) All and only the verbs that can assign a  $\theta$ -role to the subject can assign accusative case to an object

An alternative simple formulation of this correlation is given in (4):

- (4) *Relational Acc* is possible only if its predicate takes an additional, external argument

As I have argued in earlier work, however, the true generalization is evidently not about the relation between the external role and the internal case, but between the cases themselves, nominative versus accusative. I have referred to this as THE SIBLING CORRELATION (in e.g. Sigurðsson 2003: 249, 258), formulating it as follows:

- (5)  $(ACC \rightarrow NOM) \ \& \ \sim (NOM \rightarrow ACC)$

In other words, a relational ('structural') accusative is possible only in the presence of a nominative, whereas the opposite does not hold true, i.e. the nominative is the first or the independent case (an 'only child' or an 'older sibling', as it were). A similar or a related understanding has been argued for by others, most successfully by Yip et al. (1987), but also by, e.g., Haider (1984, 2000), Zaenen et al. (1985), and Maling (1993). Importantly, however, the Sibling Correlation only makes sense if it applies generally, in non-finite as well as in finite clauses (see Sigurðsson 1989, 1991). I will discuss the nature of the Sibling Correlation in section 3.

In accordance with BG or SC, unaccusative (or ergative) verbs like *arrive*, unergative verbs like *run* and raising verbs like *seem* take nominative rather than accusative subjects in nominative-accusative languages like English. This is illustrated by the following examples.

- (6) a. **She** arrived late. / \*Her arrived late.  
 b. **She** ran home. / \*Her ran home.  
 c. **She** seemed to be shocked. / \*Her seemed to be shocked.

More tellingly, an accusative object argument of a transitive verb turns up as nominative subject in passive and unaccusative constructions:

- (7) a. They fired **her**.  
 b. **She** was fired. / \*Her was fired.
- (8) a. They drowned **her**.  
 b. **She** drowned. / \*Her drowned.

These facts are well-known and have been widely studied and discussed (for a recent detailed study of case-marking in English, see Quinn 2005a). As one would expect, much the same facts are found in the other Germanic languages. This is illustrated below for only transitive/passive pairs in German, Swedish and Icelandic, respectively:

- (9) a. *Sie haben ihn gewählt.*  
 they have him.ACC chosen  
 'They chose him.'
- b. *Er wurde gewählt. / \*Ihn wurde gewählt.*  
 he.NOM was chosen / \*ACC

- (10) a. *De valde honom.*  
they chose him.ACC  
b. *Han valde-s.* / \**Honom valde-s.*  
he.NOM chose-PASS / \*ACC  
'He was chosen.'
- (11) a. *Þeir völdu hana.*  
they chose her.ACC  
b. *Hún var valin.* / \**Hana var valin.*  
she.NOM was chosen / \*ACC

## 2.2 Non-Burzionian accusatives

A priori, it is not clear why BG or SC should hold, that is, it is not obvious why the subjects in the examples above cannot be accusative. It is appropriate to further highlight this seemingly unexpected fact:

- (12) a. \*Her arrived late.  
b. \*Her ran home.  
c. \*Her seemed to be shocked.  
d. \*Her was fired.  
e. \*Her drowned.

Why is this the case in not only the other Germanic languages but in accusative languages (and accusative subsystems) in general? We shall return to this question in section 3. Irrespective of the answer, these facts illustrate a truly striking generalization, and it is indeed proper that it has a name of its own.

As acknowledged by Burzio (1986, 2000), however, it is not the case that all accusatives fall under his generalization. Adverbial accusatives in languages like German and Icelandic are perhaps the most obvious case of Non-Burzionian accusatives:

- (13) a. *Dann regnete es den ganzen Tag* / \**der ganze Tag.*  
then rained it the.ACC whole.ACC day / \*NOM  
'Then, it rained all day.'  
b. *Þá rigndi allan daginn* / \**allur dagurinn.*  
then rained all.ACC day.the.ACC / \*NOM  
'Then, it rained all day.'

Accusative adverbial NPs most commonly have a temporal reading, as in these examples, but local (path) readings also occur, as illustrated below for Icelandic:

- (14) a. *Hún synti heilan kílómetra* / \**heill kílómetri.*  
she swam whole.ACC kilometre.ACC / \*NOM  
b. *Hann gengur alltaf sömu leið* / \**sama leið.*  
he walks always same.ACC route.ACC / \*NOM

As discussed by (Zaenen et al. 1985: 474–475), path adverbials of this sort often show up in the nominative in passives, thus behaving similarly as Burzian accusatives.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to argumental accusatives, however, path accusatives may also be retained in impersonal passives, that is, the Acc passive (?)*Það er/var gengið þessa sömu leið til baka daginn eftir* ‘it is/was walked this same route.ACC back the day after’ is fairly acceptable, whereas, e.g., \**Það er/var teiknað þessa sömu leið* ‘it is/was drawn this same route.ACC’ is impossible.<sup>2</sup>

Another type of Non-Burzionian accusatives is accusative complements of prepositions. As illustrated below for English, German, Swedish and Icelandic, in that order, accusative prepositional complements are well-formed in the absence of an external argument:

- (15) a. There is much talking about **him** here.  
 b. *Hier wird (\*es) viel über **ihn** gesprochen.*  
 here is (\*it) much about him.ACC talked  
 c. *Här talas (det) mycket om **henne**.*  
 here is-talked (it) much about her.ACC  
 d. *Hér er (\*það) talað mikið um **hana**.*<sup>3</sup>  
 here is (\*it) talked much about her.ACC

These types are not problematic for BG, as it is formulated specifically for *arguments of verbs*, but they illustrate that morphological accusatives can be used for Non-Burzionian purposes, even in basically accusative systems.

On the other hand, QUIRKY ACCUSATIVES are unexpected under BG and SC. Consider the Icelandic examples below:

- (16) a. ***Mig** vantar **peninga**.*  
 me.ACC lacks money.ACC  
 ‘I lack/need money.’  
 b. ***Mig** langar heim.*  
 me.ACC longs home  
 ‘I want to go home.’  
 c. ***Mig** fúðar á þessu.*  
 me.ACC surprises in this  
 ‘I’m surprised by this.’

As seen, the accusatives in these examples are well-formed irrespective of whether their predicate takes an additional argument. That is, BG and SC would seem to make a wrong prediction for these predicates (but see below for a different interpretation).

Jónsson (1998: 35f) lists almost 60 predicates that take an accusative subject in (standard) Icelandic. As demonstrated below, Faroese (Thráinsson et al. 2004: 253f) and German also have examples of this sort, albeit much less frequently:

<sup>1</sup> In Finnish, this even applies to temporal adverbials (Maling 1993).

<sup>2</sup> This applies to my own grammar, which, as far as I can tell, is the standard variety in this respect. In the so-called ‘new passive’ variety, on the other hand, *Það er/var teiknað þessa sömu leið* ‘it is/was drawn this same route.ACC’ would be grammatical (see, e.g., Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002).

<sup>3</sup> The d-example illustrates the well-known fact that the Icelandic expletive can only occur clause-initially (Thráinsson 1979; see also Sigurðsson 2004a for a feature based approach to this Clause Initial Constraint, CLIC).

- (17) a. *Meg grunaði hetta.* Faroese  
 me.ACC suspected this.ACC  
 ‘I suspected this.’  
 b. *Mich hungert.* German  
 me.ACC hungers  
 ‘I am hungry.’

The German construction is peripheral (see, e.g., Wunderlich 2003), and it seems to be rapidly disappearing from Faroese as well (Eythórsson and Jónsson 2003). It is also losing some ground in colloquial Icelandic, through so-called ‘dative sickness’, whereby accusative experiencer subjects in examples like (16a-c) are replaced with datives (see Smith 1996 and the references there).

Icelandic has a second type of quirky accusative subjects, where the subject is not an experiencer but a theme or a patient, as illustrated below (Zaenen and Maling 1984 and many since):

- (18) a. *Okkur rak að landi.*  
 us.ACC drove to land (drove = ‘got-driven’)  
 ‘We drifted ashore.’  
 b. *Bátinn fyllti á augabragði.*  
 boat.the.ACC filled in flash (filled = ‘got-filled’)  
 ‘The boat swamped immediately.’  
 c. *Mig tók út.*  
 me.ACC took out (took = ‘got-taken’)  
 ‘I was swept overboard.’  
 d. *Mennina bar að í þessu.*  
 men.the.ACC carried towards in that (carried = ‘got-carried’)  
 ‘The men arrived then.’

As we shall see shortly, this second, theme/patient construction has an uncontrolled process or fate reading. For convenience, we may thus refer to the accusatives in (16)/(17) versus (18) as PSYCH ACCUSATIVES and FATE ACCUSATIVES, respectively.<sup>4</sup> While Psych Accusatives tend to get replaced by datives, Fate Accusatives often give way to the nominative in (mainly) colloquial Icelandic (see Eythórsson 2000), in which case they behave like ordinary unaccusatives in the language (see below).

As discussed by Haider (2001) and Kainhofer (2002), German also has Fate Accusatives of a similar sort, as illustrated in (19) (ex. (7a) in Haider 2001: 6):

- (19) *Oft treibt es ihn ins Gasthaus.*  
 often drives it him.ACC into-the bar  
 ‘He often ‘drifts’ into the bar.’

<sup>4</sup> As pointed out to me by Kjartan Ottosson, 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 Ottosson 1988). However, this does not extend to all examples of this sort, for instance (18d) and (20) below. I therefore take the liberty of using the notion ‘fate’ as a cover term for forces that are not in human power.

However, the German construction has an expletive, which perhaps or even plausibly may be analyzed as carrying nominative case.<sup>5</sup> An expletive is excluded in the Icelandic construction:

- (20) a. *Mann hrekur stundum af leið.*  
 one.ACC drives sometimes off track  
 ‘Sometimes one loses one’s track/gets carried away.’  
 b. \**Það hrekur mann stundum af leið.*  
 it drives one.ACC sometimes off track

Thus, the Icelandic construction differs from the German one. However, Icelandic has another construction that is to an extent similar to the German construction. This is the Impersonal Modal Construction, IMC, discussed in Sigurðsson (1989: 163ff), with an arbitrary external role and an optional expletive (the expletive is generally only optional in Icelandic, see Thráinsson 1979). IMC is exemplified in (21); as suggested by the postverbal position of the accusatives, they are regular objects and not quirky subjects (in contrast to the quirky accusatives in (16), (18) and (20)):

- (21) a. *Það á að byggja húsið hér.*  
 it has to build house.the.ACC here  
 ‘They are going to build the house here.’  
 b. *Það þarf að aðstoða hana.*  
 it needs to assist her.ACC  
 ‘One needs to assist her.’  
 c. *Hér má ekki reykja vindla.*  
 here may not smoke cigars.ACC  
 ‘One may not smoke cigars here.’

Possibly, however, both IMC and the German construction throw a light on the origin of the Icelandic Fate Accusative, that is, it may have grown out of a similar transitive construction, with an unexpressed ‘fate subject’, as it were.

As discussed by Zaenen and Maling (1984) and by Sigurðsson (1989), ordinary unaccusatives have similar properties in Icelandic as in related languages, showing the familiar ACC-TO-NOM CONVERSION when compared to homophonous or related transitives, much like passives. Consider the following transitive-passive-unaccusative triple:

- |         |                                 |               |         |
|---------|---------------------------------|---------------|---------|
| (22) a. | <i>Hún stækkaði garðinn.</i>    | Transitive:   | Nom-Acc |
|         | she enlarged garden.the.ACC     |               |         |
| b.      | <i>Garðurinn var stækkaður.</i> | Passive:      | Nom     |
|         | garden.the.NOM was enlarged     |               |         |
| c.      | <i>Garðurinn stækkaði.</i>      | Unaccusative: | Nom     |
|         | garden.the.NOM enlarged         |               |         |

In contrast, Fate Accusative predicates, like the ones in (18), show an unexpected and (what seems to be) a cross-linguistically very rare behavior, in taking an UNACCUSATIVE ACCUSATIVE, as it were:

<sup>5</sup> This might extend to the ‘new passive’ in Icelandic (type ‘It was hit me.ACC’). I will not discuss this here, but see, e.g., Sigurðsson (1989: 355f), Sigurjónsdóttir and Maling (2001), Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002).

- |         |  |                                  |
|---------|--|----------------------------------|
| (23) a. | <i>Hún fyllti <b>bátinn</b>.</i><br>she filled boat.the.ACC    | Transitive:    Nom- <b>Acc</b>   |
| b.      | <i><b>Báturinn</b> var fylltur.</i><br>boat.the.NOM was filled | Passive: <b>Nom</b>              |
| c.      | <i><b>Bátinn</b> fyllti.</i><br>boat.the.ACC filled            | Unaccusative: <u><b>Acc!</b></u> |

In contrast, datives and genitives are regularly retained in both passives and unaccusatives:<sup>6</sup>

- |         |   |                                |
|---------|---|--------------------------------|
| (24) a. | <i>Hún seinkaði <b>ferðinni</b>.</i><br>she delayed journey.the.DAT | Transitive:    Nom- <b>Dat</b> |
| b.      | <i><b>Ferðinni</b> var seinkað.</i><br>journey.the.DAT was delayed  | Passive: <b>Dat</b>            |
| c.      | <i><b>Ferðinni</b> seinkaði.</i><br>journey.the.DAT delayed         | Unaccusative: <b>Dat</b>       |

On a lexical approach to quirky and inherent case-marking, we would seem to be forced to analyze the accusative in (23c) (and the ones in (18)) as lexical, that is, as selected by an quirky case requiring feature or property of the predicate (see the discussion in Sigurðsson 1989: 280ff). As seen in (23b), however, this accusative is not retained in the passive, instead undergoing the Nom-to-Acc conversion regularly seen for ordinary relational, non-inherent accusatives, as in (22b). That is, what would seem to be ‘one and the same’ accusative shows paradoxical behavior. We may refer to this state of affairs as the FATE ACCUSATIVE PUZZLE. As we shall see soon, however, the puzzle is in a sense not real, as the unaccusative accusative is arguably not the ‘same’ accusative as the transitive one.

As recently discussed by McFadden (2004), McIntyre (2005) and Svenonius (2005), there are reasons to believe that the inherent cases are in fact structurally matched against syntactic heads or features rather than lexically licensed.<sup>7</sup> In this vein, Svenonius (2005) argues for a structural solution to the Fate Accusative Puzzle, suggesting that the predicates in question “have a CAUSE component but only an optional VOICE, in the sense of Kratzer (1996) and Pytkäinen (1999)” – where VOICE is the head that licenses AGENT. In addition, Svenonius (2005) suggests that CAUSE is “implicated in the licensing of accusative case, and is absent from normal unaccusatives”. That is, predicates are varyingly complex, transitives

<sup>6</sup> As opposed to nominalizations and the so-called ‘middle’ *-st* construction (see Zaenen and Maling 1984 and many since, e.g., Svenonius 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Thus, as has been observed in the literature every now and then, there is generally no fixed linking between lexical roots and specific cases, as illustrated by numerous minimal pairs like the following one (involving various types of predicates):

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| (i) a.  | <i><b>Veðrið</b> er kalt.</i><br>weather.the.NOM is cold  |
| b.      | <i><b>Mér</b> er kalt.</i><br>me.DAT is cold<br>‘I’m freezing.’   |
| (ii) a. | <i><b>Húsið</b> var lokað.</i><br>house.the.NOM was closed<br>‘The house was (in the state of being) closed.’                 |
| b.      | <i><b>Húsinu</b> var lokað.</i><br>house.the.DAT was closed<br>‘The house was (in the process of being) closed (by someone).’ |



having both VOICE and CAUSE, Fate Accusative predicates or ‘accusative unaccusatives’ having only CAUSE, and regular unaccusatives having neither:<sup>8</sup>

- (25) a. [VoicP DP<sub>NOM</sub> VOIC [CausP CAUS [VP V DP<sub>ACC</sub>]]] Transitive Nom-Acc  
 b. [CausP CAUS [VP V DP<sub>ACC</sub>]] Acc unaccusatives  
 c. [VP V DP<sub>NOM</sub>] Nom unaccusatives

Dative taking unaccusatives, like *seinka* ‘delay’ in (24c), also have the CAUSE component plus a special dative or DAT feature, “necessary for the assignment of dative case” (ibid). The transitive and the dative unaccusative in (24a,c) thus have roughly the following structures:

- (26) a. [VoicP DP<sub>NOM</sub> VOIC [CausP CAUS [DatP DAT [VP V DP<sub>DAT</sub>]]]] Transitive Nom-Dat  
 b. [CausP CAUS [DatP DAT [VP V DP<sub>DAT</sub>]]] Dat unaccusatives

Icelandic has many kinds of datives (Barðdal 2001, Maling 2002a, 2002b, Jónsson 2003, Sigurðsson 2003: 230ff), so we must understand DAT as a shorthand for an array of syntactic features (‘heads’) or feature combinations, each such feature or feature combination leading to dative case-marking in Icelandic morphology.<sup>9</sup> With that modification, it seems to me that Svenonius has developed an interesting approach to many of the numerous facts known from the voluminous literature on Icelandic case. However, while a structural approach to the inherent cases is promising, such an approach to the relational, so-called ‘structural’ cases (Burzianian Nom/Acc) is fundamentally mistaken, I believe, contradictory as that may seem (see also Sigurðsson 2003, 2006). I will return to the issue in section 3.

As mentioned above, the peculiar ‘accusative unaccusative’ construction in Icelandic has a special uncontrolled process semantics, a get-passive fate reading of a sort, hence the term Fate Accusative. Consider (18) = (27):

- (27) a. **Okkur** *rak að landi.*  
 us.ACC drove to land (drove = ‘got-driven’)  
 ‘We drifted ashore.’  
 b. **Bátinn** *fyllti á augabragði.*  
 boat.the.ACC filled in flash (filled = ‘got-filled’)  
 ‘The boat swamped immediately.’  
 c. **Mig** *tók út.*  
 me.ACC took out (took = ‘got-taken’)  
 ‘I was swept overboard.’  
 d. **Mennina** *bar að í þessu.*  
 men.the.ACC carried towards in that (carried = ‘got-carried’)  
 ‘The men arrived then.’

Importantly, this fate reading is *not* shared by the transitive or passive counterparts to these (or other Fate Accusative) predicates (as already pointed out by Ottosson 1988: 148). Thus, Icelandic “we filled the boat” and “the boat was filled” has much the same expected readings as English *We filled the boat* and *The boat was filled*, that is, it means that the boat was deliberately filled in some usual, expected manner, with fish or some cargo. Icelandic “the boat filled”, in contrast, has only one very specific meaning, namely that the boat

<sup>8</sup> Svenonius assumes a slightly more complex analysis (where active versus passive or ACT and PASS play a crucial role), but the presentation in (25) is sufficiently detailed for our purposes.

<sup>9</sup> The same features are arguably present in the syntax of languages, such as English, that ‘keep quiet’ about them in their morphology (cf. Sigurðsson 2003, 2004d).

unexpectedly and dangerously got filled with water, i.e. that it ‘swamped’. Similarly, Icelandic *Mig tók út* in (27c), literally ‘me took out’, cannot possibly mean that ‘somebody took me out’. It has only one, very specific meaning, the fate reading that I ‘accidentally swept aboard’. In all cases of this sort, the transitive and passive versions have much the same general, broad semantics as in English and other related languages, whereas ‘accusative unaccusatives’ always have a narrow, semi-idiomatic fate meaning, absent from the transitive and the passive.

This important fact has not been generally noticed or highlighted, so one commonly sees pairs like the following in the literature (here taken from Sigurðsson 1989: 216, but see also similar examples in e.g. Zaenen and Maling 1984, Jónsson 1998, Svenonius 2005):

- (28) a. *Bátinn rak á land.*  
 boat.the.ACC drove on land  
 ‘The boat drifted ashore.’  
 b. *Stormurinn rak bátinn á land.*  
 storm.the.NOM drove boat.the.ACC on land

This description is however misleading. As pointed out already by Ottosson (1988: 147f), transitive clauses like (28a) are semantically anomalous, since transitive verbs like *reka* ‘drive’ usually require an animate agent. The same holds for other apparent pairs or sets of transitives/passives and ‘accusative unaccusatives’, as illustrated below for *fylla* ‘fill’:

- (29) a. *Bátinn fyllti (af sjó).*  
 boat.the.ACC filled (with sea)  
 ‘The boat swamped.’  
 b. ? *Sjórinn fyllti bátinn.*  
 sea.the.NOM filled boat.the.ACC
- (30) a. *Við fylltum bátinn.*  
 we.NOM filled boat.the.ACC  
 ‘We filled the boat (with cargo, fish, etc.).’  
 b. *Báturinn var fylltur.*  
 boat.the.NOM was filled  
 ‘The boat was filled (with cargo, fish, etc.).’

Thus, the ‘accusative unaccusatives’ require a special fate or uncontrolled process feature to be present or active in their clausal structure. Call this feature simply FATE. There is no doubt, as we have seen, that this feature is precluded in related transitives and passives, and the natural interpretation of that fact is that FATE is a voice feature of a sort, blocking or ‘turning off’ the usual voice feature that otherwise introduces AGENT in both transitives and passives.<sup>10</sup> As Ottosson (1988: 148) puts it, Fate Accusatives occur “in a construction that stands outside the regular voice system”. That is, the nature of Fate Accusatives is quite different from that of normal relational (not semantically linked) accusatives, and hence the Fate Accusative Puzzle is not real.

The FATE feature is largely (but not entirely) specific for the ‘accusative unaccusatives’, that is, it is not generally active in structures with either regular unaccusatives or dative

<sup>10</sup> An issue of general theoretical interest is whether inactive features are syntactically absent, or present but default or not activated. I assume the latter (following Cinque 1999: 127ff; for a general discussion, see also Sigurðsson 2004d).

taking unaccusatives. This is illustrated for the dative taking *ljúka* ‘finish, end’ (discussed in, e.g., Sigurðsson 1989 and Svenonius 2005):

- (31) a. *Hún lauk sögunni.*  
 she.NOM finished story.the.DAT  
 ‘She finished the story.’  
 b. *Sögunni lauk.*  
 story.the.DAT finished  
 ‘The story ended/came to an end.’

The transitive means ‘end/finish something’, and the unaccusative also has the general core meaning ‘end’, without any special reading being added. While Fate Accusative predicates yield information about the power (fate/natural forces) causing the event, such semantically narrowing or specifying information is absent from many or most other unaccusative predicates. It is of course logically possible that an event expressed by predicates like *ljúka* ‘finish, end’, *seinka* ‘delay’ in (24) and *stækka* ‘enlarge’ in (22) can be due to fate or natural forces, but this reading is not forced for these predicates, in contrast with Fate Accusative predicates.

In sum, there is no doubt that Fate Accusatives relate to semantics of a rather special sort. However, this does not alter the fact that these peculiar accusatives are like Psych Accusatives in that they do not comply with BG or the Sibling Correlation. Restaurant Talk Accusatives, recently discussed by Wiese and Maling (2005), on the other hand, can be analyzed as involving deletion, as sketched below for German and Icelandic, respectively:<sup>11</sup>

- (32) a. *Ich—möchte Einen Kaffee bekommen, bitte.*  
 I.NOM would-like a coffee.ACC get, please  
 ‘One coffee, please’  
 b. *Ég—vil—fá Tvo stóra bjóra, takk.*  
 I.NOM want get two large beers.ACC, please

Similarly, accusatives in PRO infinitives are unproblematic if nominative is active in such infinitives (as argued in Sigurðsson 1989, 1991):

- (33) a. *Mir graut [PRO den Brief zu schreiben].* German  
 me.DAT dreads PRO the letter.ACC to write  
 ‘I find it dreadful to write the letter.’  
 b. *Mér leiðist [að PRO lesa bókina].* Icelandic  
 me.DAT bores to PRO read book.the.ACC  
 ‘I find it boring to read the book.’

Icelandic has many predicates that take a dative subject and a nominative object (Thráinsson 1979, Zaenen et al. 1985, Sigurðsson 1989, 1996, and many others), and German has some similar Dat-Nom predicates (usually taken to have different properties as regards subjecthood versus objecthood, but see Eythórsson and Barðdal 2005 and Barðdal 2006 for a different view). In contrast, some related and/or similar predicates in Faroese are Dat-Acc predicates, as illustrated in the examples below (from Thráinsson et al. 2004: 255ff):

<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, one can assume silent functional categories in examples of this sort, including the subject number and person, a modal head commonly expressed by verbs meaning ‘want’ and a silent main predicate commonly expressed by verbs meaning ‘get’. Under such an approach (tallying with the approach to morphosyntactic silence argued for in Sigurðsson 2004d), the problem of recoverability does not arise.

- (34) a. *Mær líkar hana væl.*  
me.DAT likes her.ACC well  
'I like her.'
- b. *Henni vantar góða orðabók.*  
her.DAT lacks good dictionary.ACC  
'She needs a good dictionary.'

The Icelandic equivalent of (34b) can in fact also be heard in substandard Icelandic. Conversely, Faroese also has some Dat-Nom predicates.

In Sigurðsson (2003), I argued that accusatives in examples of this sort are relational, the structures in question involving an invisible nominative, triggering or licensing the accusative (in accordance with the Sibling Correlation; for related ideas see Haider 2001, but for a different approach, see, e.g., Woolford 2003). This would seem to get support from the historical development in English in general (Allen 1996) and partly in Faroese, where numerous predicates have altered their case frames in the following manner:

- (35)  $\text{Dat}_i\text{-Nom}_j > \text{Dat}_i\text{-Acc}_j$  (or  $\text{Oblique}_i\text{-Oblique}_j$ )  $> \text{Nom}_i\text{-Acc}_j$

Alternatively, one might want to suggest that the accusative in Faroese Dat-Acc constructions is licensed by the external dative or that it is some sort of a default case, but that would seem to raise even more difficult problems and questions than the invisible nominative case approach, most simply the question of why the Faroese subject dative should license or allow object accusative any more than external datives in e.g. standard Icelandic, German and Old English. Also, invoking the notion of 'default case' amounts to giving up any hope of an insightful account. If Faroese resorts to default case in its Dat-Acc constructions, the question arises why it does not in e.g. predicative constructions (see the next subsection). Moreover, the change  $\text{Dat}_i\text{-Acc}_j > \text{Nom}_i\text{-Acc}_j$  would involve two changes on the default case approach (*inherent-default*  $>$  *relational-relational*), whereas it involves only one change on the relational case approach (*inherent+relational-relational*  $>$  *relational-relational*). In addition, the accusative in the Faroese Dat-Acc pattern seems to be like regular relational accusatives in not being semantically linked, unlike both Psych Accusatives and Fate Accusatives.

Regardless of how we account for the exceptional Dat-Acc pattern in Faroese, it is clearly unexpected under any straightforward morphological understanding of Burzio's Generalization (BG) and the Sibling Correlation (SC), like Psych Accusatives and Fate Accusatives. Yet another type of unexpected argumental accusatives is found in a peculiar (and lexically a very limited) raising construction in Icelandic (discussed in Sigurðsson 1989, e.g., 218f), where accusative is retained or 'fossilized', in contrast to, e.g., both German and English:

- (36) a. *Ólaf/\*Ólafur var hvergi að finna* \_\_\_\_.  
Olaf.ACC/\*NOM was nowhere to find
- b. *Er/\*Ihn war nirgends zu finden* \_\_\_\_.  
he/\*him was nowhere to find
- c. *He/\*Him was nowhere to be found* \_\_\_\_.

As mentioned above, adverbial and prepositional accusatives are not really problematic for BG or SC. On the other hand, all the argumental accusatives that are well-formed in the absence of an external nominative argument are unexpected under BG/SC:

- Psych Accusatives in Icelandic and to an extent in German and Faroese
- Fate Accusatives in Icelandic (and possibly in German varieties, depending on whether or not the expletive carries nominative case)
- The ‘fossilized’ accusative in Icelandic examples like (36a) (perhaps only a subtype of the Fate Accusative)
- The accusative in Faroese Dat-Acc constructions

Moreover, English allows (subject and) object accusatives in gerunds like the following ones (see e.g. Quinn 2005a, section 8.6), where there is no visible well-formed nominative:<sup>12</sup>

- (37) a. I was embarrassed [by him seeing **me** there].  
 b. [His accusing **me**] surprised me greatly.  
 c. [Him seeing **me** there] was unfortunate.  
 d. \*[He seeing me there] embarrassed me.

There seems no doubt that the object accusative in examples of this sort is a regular accusative, much as in subjectless gerunds and PRO infinitives:

- (38) a. Seeing **me** there suprised him.  
 b. To see **me** there surprised him.

On the relational view of the so-called ‘structural’ cases, the object accusative in all these cases is licensed by an active nominative case feature, even though the nominative is morphologically invisible. The same applies to the matrix accusative in examples like (38), where the gerund *seeing me there* and the infinitive *to see me there* receive invisible nominative case, thereby licensing the matrix accusative *him* (see Sigurðsson 2003: 248). An alternative view would be that these object accusatives are exceptional in one way or another. That does not seem to be the case.

One way around the problem raised by Non-Burzionian accusatives in at least Icelandic (see e.g. Burzio 2000, Sigurðsson 1989) is to say that these accusatives are inherent, like datives and genitives, and to formulate BG such that it applies to *relational* (‘structural’) accusatives only, as I did in (4) above. This might seem to be circular and vacuous. First, we adopt a broad generalization over accusative case, and then, when we learn about accusatives that do not behave as the generalization would lead us to expect, we reformulate it such that it does not apply to these ‘exceptional’ accusatives. By also excluding other types of ‘different’ accusatives (prepositional, adverbial) we end up with a notion of a relational accusative that simply means ‘an accusative that behaves in accordance with BG/SC.’

However, in spite of the seemingly ad hoc flavor of this approach, it is empirically *quite correct*, as far as can be seen. Outside the domain of exceptional or Non-Burzionian accusatives, Burzio’s Generalization really does hold true for all Germanic varieties and, quite presistently, across accusative systems in general.<sup>13</sup> Thus, even in Icelandic, Non-

<sup>12</sup> Joan Maling and Andrew McIntyre, p.c. The fact, illustrated in the d-example, that the subject of the gerund cannot be nominative seems to suggest that the accusative of the gerund subject in the c-example is a prepositional accusative of a sort (like the subject accusative in the a-example), assigned by a deleted or a silent *for*-type preposition (‘for him seeing me there ...’, as it were). I refrain from taking a stand on the issue, though (according to Huddleston, Pullum et al. 2002: 460, at least some gerunds can have a nominative subject in formal style).

<sup>13</sup> Outside the Germanic languages, exceptional or Non-Burzionian accusatives are found in, e.g., Tamil (Dat-Acc, see Lehmann 1993: 184ff) and Modern Greek (Gen-Acc, see e.g. Anagnostopoulou 2003).

Burzionian accusatives are generally excluded, as illustrated below for the most central predicate types:

- (39) a. *Hún/\*Hana kom seint.*  
           she/\*her arrived late  
       b. *Hún/\*Hana hljóp heim.*  
           she/\*her ran home  
       c. *Hún/\*Hana virtist verða skelkuð.*  
           she/\*her seemed become shocked  
       d. *Hún/\*Hana var rekin.*  
           she/\*her was fired  
       e. *Hún/\*Hana druknaði.*  
           she/\*her drowned

Thus, in spite of the fact that Icelandic and some other languages have some types of Non-Burzionian accusatives, Burzio's Generalization or the Sibling Correlation expresses a striking truth about accusative systems and must therefore be taken seriously as a 'revelation' of the nature of the relational cases.

Having established that most of the Non-Burzionian accusatives discussed in this section can be specially accounted for and are thus not counterevidence against the Sibling Correlation, we can take the 'main road' again, turning to the Germanic predicative Nom/Acc variation.

### 2.3 The Germanic predicative Nom/Acc variation

The case-rich Germanic languages all have *nominative predicative DPs* (in non-ECM):<sup>14</sup>

- (40) a. *Ikh bin a guter yid* / *\*a gutn yid.*                      Yiddish: NOM  
           I am a good Jew.NOM/ \*ACC  
       b. *Das sind wir* / *\*uns.*                                      German: NOM  
           that/this are we / \*us  
           'That/This is us.'  
       c. *Tað eru vit* / *\*okkum.*                                      Faroese: NOM  
           it are we / \*us  
           'It is us.'  
       d. *Það erum við* / *\*okkur.*                                      Icelandic: NOM  
           it are we / \*us  
           'It is us.'

The case-poor Germanic languages, on the other hand, show a remarkable variation with respect to predicative case, that has, to my knowledge, never been carefully studied. English, Danish, most varieties of Norwegian (Norw1) and North Frisian have *accusative marking of predicative NPs*:

- (41) a. It is **us**.    English: ACC  
       b. *Det er os.*    Danish: ACC  
           it is us

<sup>14</sup> See Maling and Sprouse (1995) on predicative case in some of the Germanic languages. I have not been able to track down any other studies of predicative case from a comparative/generative Germanic perspective.

- |    |                    |             |     |
|----|--------------------|-------------|-----|
| c. | <i>Det er oss.</i> | Norw1:      | ACC |
|    | it is us           |             |     |
| d. | <i>Dât as ûs.</i>  | N. Frisian: | ACC |
|    | it is us           |             |     |

In English, predicate nominative examples like *It is I* do occur, above all in the written language (e.g., Quinn 2005a: 233ff).<sup>15</sup> Corresponding Danish examples, *\*Det er jeg*, etc., are unacceptable in all contexts (Allan et al. 1995: 143).

The other case-poor Germanic languages normally have *nominative marking*:

- |         |                                 |             |     |
|---------|---------------------------------|-------------|-----|
| (42) a. | <i>Det är vi/*oss.</i>          | Swedish:    | NOM |
|         | is is we/*us                    |             |     |
| b.      | <i>Det er vi.</i> <sup>16</sup> | Norw2:      | NOM |
|         | is is we                        |             |     |
| c.      | <i>Dat zijn wij/*ons.</i>       | Dutch:      | NOM |
|         | is are we/*us                   |             |     |
| d.      | <i>Dat bin ik/*my.</i>          | W. Frisian: | NOM |
|         | it is I/*me                     |             |     |
| e.      | <i>Dit is ek(ke)/*my.</i>       | Afrikaans:  | NOM |
|         | it is I/*me                     |             |     |

The English type accusative marking in (41) has not generally been taken seriously as a linguistic fact, at least not within generative case theory. As Quinn puts it, in her detailed study of English case-marking (2005a: 1), it has often been assumed or suggested “that pronoun case selection in English is largely unsystematic, and best treated as the product of local rules, grammatical viruses, and hypercorrection” (see also the historical opinion survey in Visser 1963: 241ff). The fact that English shares many of its case properties with some other Germanic varieties immediately suggests that this view must be mistaken (as also pointed out by Visser 1963: 244). Nonetheless, the Germanic predicative Nom/Acc variation has remained largely neglected within generative case theory, for the embarrassing reason, I believe, that there is really nothing interesting to be said about it under a structural approach to the relational cases – under such an approach the predicative case variation makes no sense, it is just unexpected and mysterious. In contrast, I will here argue that the English type of case facts are indeed serious and ‘intelligent’ data that can be systematically accounted for to a much greater extent than often assumed.

For convenience, I will refer to the Germanic languages that (normally or centrally) apply nominative versus accusative marking of predicative DPs as PREDICATE NOMINATIVE LANGUAGES versus PREDICATE ACCUSATIVE LANGUAGES.

Most of the predicate nominative case-poor languages are actually partly predicate accusative. Thus, in the third person, both Dutch and West Frisian allow accusative marking,

<sup>15</sup> Examples of this sort have variable status, that is, fixed expressions like *This is she* (as a formula used to answer the telephone) and *It is I* are better or more familiar than for instance *??It is we* (Joan Maling, p.c., Heidi Quinn p.c., see also Huddleston, Pullum, et al. 2002: 459). However, the expressions in question seem to be kept alive mainly or exclusively by prescriptivist influences (Joan Maling, p.c., Andrew McIntyre, p.c.).

<sup>16</sup> The distinction I’m making between Norwegian 1 and Norwegian 2 is based on the description in Faarlund et al. (1997: 319), but it is slightly misleading, it seems (Marit Julien, p.c.). Most speakers can apply only the accusative, while other speakers can apply either the everyday accusative or the more ‘conscious’ nominative (perhaps due to the influence of language planners). – The focus position in Norwegian clefts often requires nominative marking of the postcopular DP (Fossum 1995). This position shows special case properties in many languages (see Huddleston, Pullum et al. 2002: 459 on English), but I shall not discuss this here.

provided that the pronoun is a weak one (in which case focal stress moves from the pronoun onto the verb), as illustrated in the c-examples below:<sup>17</sup>

- (43) a. *Dat is hij.* Dutch  
           it is he  
       b. \**Dat is hem.*  
           it is him  
       c. *Dat IS 'm.*
- (44) a. *Dat is hy.* W. Frisian  
           it is he  
       b. \**Dat is him.*  
           it is him  
       c. *Dat IS 'm.*

In the first and the second person, on the other hand, accusative is always ungrammatical (irrespective of focal stress and verb agreement), as illustrated for only the first person in only Dutch below:

- (45) a. *Dat ben ik.* / \**Dat ben/is mij.*  
           it am I / it am/is me  
       b. *Dat zijn wij.* / \**Dat zijn/is ons.*  
           it are we / it are/is us

This is reminiscent of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> versus 3<sup>rd</sup> person contrasts in other languages, for instance the fact that agreement with nominative objects in Icelandic is possible only in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person (Sigurðsson 1996, Boeckx 2000, etc.), and, in particular, the fact that accusative clitics can only be in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person in the presence of a dative clitic in the double object construction in numerous languages, for instance Romance and Slavic languages (the Person-Case Constraint, see Perlmutter 1971, Bonet 1991, and, e.g., Anagnostopoulou 2003). It is not clear though, whether there is a correlation between these widely discussed phenomena and the Dutch/West Frisian facts above. I have not been able to find any obvious connection.

In spite of generally being predicate nominative languages, both Dutch and West Frisian apply accusative in modal contexts, as opposed to Afrikaans, as illustrated below:

- (46) a. *Ik wil **jou** zijn, jij kan **mij** zijn.* Dutch  
           I want you.ACC be, you can me.ACC be

<sup>17</sup> My informants cannot use the weak *het* 'it' here (but for a discussion of a Dutch grammar where this is possible, see van Gelderen 1997: 152ff). With a weak *it*-pronoun, many or most speakers of both Dutch and German accept only the West-Germanic *Inverted Predicative Construction* (IPC) 'we are it', etc. (German: *Wir sind es*; Dutch: *Wij zijn het*). This type was also prevailing in Old English, with the non-verb-second order 'we it are' (see the example in (55a) below), but it is not generally acceptable in the Scandinavian languages and Modern English. I don't have anything interesting to say about the correlation between IPC and the regular, non-inverted predicative construction. Let me just emphasize that verb agreement is clearly not decided by 'subjecthood' in the Germanic languages. Thus, predicative NPs control verb agreement in Icelandic examples like the following (Sigurðsson 1996, 2004b, 2004c):

- (i) Það hafið þá sennilega bara verið þið.  
       it have.2PL then probably only been you.NOM.PL  
       'It has then probably only been you.'



- b. *Ik wol **dy** wêze, do kinst **my** wêze.* W. Frisian  
 I want you.ACC be, you can me.ACC be
- c. *Ek wil **jy** wees, jy kan **ek** wees.* Afrikaans  
 I want you.NOM be, you can I.NOM be

Similarly, Dutch and West Frisian opt for the accusative in conditionals, again as opposed to Afrikaans:

- (47) a. *Als ik **jou** was ...* Dutch  
 if I you.ACC were
- b. *At ik **dy** wie ...* W. Frisian  
 if I you.ACC were
- c. *As ek **jy** was ...* Afrikaans  
 if I you.NOM were

It seems, then, that Dutch and West Frisian are or have been developing in the ‘English direction’, so to speak, along several different paths. A similar process can be observed for Swedish (as discussed in part by Teleman 2001), but, interestingly, the paths of the change are not always the same as in Dutch and West Frisian. Thus, most speakers (who regularly distinguish between nominatives and accusatives) accept only the nominative in conditionals (although the accusative is clearly less marked here than in, e.g., (49) below):

- (48) *Om jag vore **du**/?dig ...*  
 if I were you.NOM/?ACC

In general, the nominative is the only option, it seems, when the predicative construction expresses plain IDENTITY, as in the following examples (the first one is modelled on an example in Teleman 2001):

- (49) a. *Den här lilla pojken på bilden är **jag**/\*mig.*  
 this here little boy.the on photo.the is I/\*me
- b. *Han/Det är/ÄR inte **han**/\*honom.*  
 he/it is/IS not he/\*him

If, on the other hand, the predicative construction gets a reading where the predicative DP takes on the ROLE of the subject DP, rather than its IDENTITY, then the predicate DP can be accusative for some speakers. This is illustrated below, where the % sign indicates that the acceptability is subject to some speaker variation (again, the a-example is based on Teleman 2001):

- (50) a.% *Jag låtsas inte vara **dig**.*  
 I.NOM pretend not be you.ACC  
 ‘I’m not pretending to be you.’
- b.% *Jag vill vara **dig**, du kan vara **mig**.*  
 I.NOM want be you.ACC, you.NOM can be me.ACC

Also, as mentioned by Teleman (2001), accusative is the only option in most reflexive predicates, for most or all speakers:<sup>18</sup>

- (51) a. *Jag är inte längre mig själv* / *\*jag själv*.  
I am not longer me.ACC (my)self / \*I.NOM (my)self  
'I'm not myself any more.'
- b. *Han är inte längre sig själv* / *\*han själv*.  
he is not longer REFL.ACC (him)self / \*he.NOM (him)self  
'He is not himself any more.'

In addition, there is considerable case variation (both individual and formal/informal) in comparative predicative phrases introduced by *än* 'than' and *som* 'as, like', accusative in general being more common than nominative in the spoken language, whereas nominative is more typical of the written language (Teleman et al. 1999, vol. 3: 672ff):

- (52) a. *Hon är större än jag/mig*.  
she is taller than I/me  
'She is taller than me.'
- b. *Karlar som vi/oss gör inte så*.  
chaps as we/us do not so  
'Chaps like us don't behave like that.'
- c. *Hon kan inte älska en karl som jag/mig*.  
she can not love a chap like I/me  
'She can't love a chap like me.'

Among the case-poor Germanic languages, Afrikaans is the most persistent predicate nominative language. As for the case-rich Germanic languages, predicative DPs in finite clauses in Icelandic, Faroese and standard German are, to my knowledge, exclusively nominative.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, however, some German varieties display at least some 'accusative tendencies'. Thus, many speakers of the Ruhr-dialect show the following pattern, with nominative pronominal predicative DPs but (preferably) accusative full predicative DPs:<sup>20</sup>

- (53) a. *Dat bin ich*. / *\*Dat is mich*.  
that am I / \*that is me
- b. *Dat is er*. / *\*Dat is ihn*.  
that is he / \*that is him
- c. *Dat is 'n feinen Kerl*.  
that is a fine chap.ACC

<sup>18</sup> Compatible facts are found for at least some Alemannic varieties. Philipp Conzett provides the following example from his Alemannic (spoken in Graubünden in easternmost Switzerland):

(i) I bin nümma **mi** selber.  
I am not-more my.ACC self

<sup>19</sup> I have not been able to get reliable information on Yiddish in this respect.

<sup>20</sup> René Schiering, p.c. For full DPs, as in the c-example, the nominative is also grammatical, but it is clearly marked as standard, non-colloquial, at least to fluent speakers of the dialect. This kind of Nom/Acc variation is probably found in other parts of the Low German area, but I have no accurate information on its geographical distribution. Much descriptive work on the syntax of German dialects or languages remains to be done.

In contrast, speakers of Alemannic varieties accept some accusative pronominal predicates, in many of the same environments as discussed above for Dutch and West Frisian:<sup>21</sup>

- (54) a. *Des ISCH (e)n doch.*  
           that is him.ACC though  
           ‘That is him, for sure.’  
       b. *Wenn ich dich wär, ...*  
           if I you.ACC were  
       c. *Ich will dich si, du kasch mich si.*  
           I want you.ACC be, you can me.ACC be

The historical development of the English predicative construction is usually described in categorically distinct steps, as demonstrated below for the first person singular (based on the overview in Quinn 2005a: 243):

- (55) a. Old English and Early Middle English:    *ic hit eom* (‘I it am’)  
       b. Late Middle English (Chaucer):           *it am I*  
       c. Early Modern English:                   *it is I*  
       d. Modern English:                         *it is me*

What this describes is actually several changes. It is a well-known fact that each change of this sort is typically a gradual process, spreading to different constructions or grammatical domains at different times (see, e.g., the general discussion in Fischer et al. 2000: 17ff). The Germanic predicate Nom/Acc variation, so briefly outlined here, suggests that this also applied to the English changes sketched above. The fact that we know only very few details of this history (see Visser 1963: 236ff, 244ff) is revealing about the limitations and challenges of diachronic linguistics. Conversely, however, there is also an important positive lesson to be learned about language change from the present study: Comparative studies of contemporary language variation are likely to yield important, complementary information about the paths and the nature of language change that is not readily accessible through historical studies.

More importantly for our present purposes, the Germanic predicate Nom/Acc variation suggests that the structural approach to the Nom/Acc alternation generally adopted in generative syntax must be abandoned. I discuss this issue in more detail in section 4, after having discussed the nature of the relational (‘structural’) cases in section 3.

### 3 Relational case

On the relational view of the so-called ‘structural’ cases, formulated in the Sibling Correlation in (5) above, relational accusative is dependent on nominative being present or active in the structure. That is, the true correlation Burzio (1986) tried to capture with his famous generalization is *not* between the external role and the internal case of a predicate but

<sup>21</sup> Markus Benzinger, p.c. (his Alemannic variety is spoken in the southernmost Baden region in Germany). As indicated, the pronoun is weak and the verb has focal stress in the a-example, much as in corresponding examples in Dutch and West-Frisian (Ellen Brandner, p.c.). Also as in Dutch and West Frisian, first and second person predicative DPs must be nominative in plain indicative, non-modal examples of this sort. – Philipp Konzett tells me that only strong nominative forms are possible in examples like (54a) in his Alemannic variety (Graubünden), whereas accusative is the only option for him in conditionals and modal constructions, like (54b,c).

between its cases, nominative versus accusative or CASE1 versus CASE2. Hence, it is not surprising that nominative is independent of the other cases and also the simple case, normally used for DPs in lists and other isolated DPs, as well as for DPs in simple structures (unergative, unaccusative, and, in many languages, predicative), whereas other cases are typically added in more complex structures (transitive, ditransitive).

Relational case assignment is seemingly a problem for the minimalist bottom-to-top approach to the derivation. The standard minimalist assumption (Chomsky 1995, 2000, 2002) is that accusative is assigned lower in the structure than nominative and hence also before nominative is assigned. However, as we have seen, accusative is dependent on nominative being present or active in the structure, that is, the accusative would have to ‘know’ that nominative is going to be assigned later on in the derivation. In other words, this forces us to assume look-ahead, a fatal problem in minimalist approaches.<sup>22</sup>

As I have argued elsewhere, however, the problem vanishes under the LOW NOMINATIVE HYPOTHESIS (Sigurðsson 2004b, 2006), under which it is actually the nominative argument that is merged lower and earlier than the accusative argument:

- (56) Nom is the *first case*, Acc is the *second case*:
- a. V [ $\theta_1$ ] (and  $\theta_{1 \rightarrow \text{Nom}}$  in morphology)
  - b.  $\theta_2$  [V  $\theta_1$ ] (and  $\theta_{2 \rightarrow \text{Acc}}$  in morphology)

As indicated, I assume that the cases themselves are not realized or assigned until in morphology.

Later on in the derivation the low argument,  $\theta_{1(\rightarrow \text{Nom})}$ , is raised across the high argument,  $\theta_{2(\rightarrow \text{Acc})}$ , to match subject number and subject person, yielding the normal surface order Nom-Acc:

- (57)  $\theta_{2(\rightarrow \text{Acc})}$  [V  $\theta_{1(\rightarrow \text{Nom})}$ ]  $\rightarrow$  NOM .... ACC .... ~~NOM~~

The reason why the low argument,  $\theta_{1(\rightarrow \text{Nom})}$ , can raise across the higher argument,  $\theta_{2(\rightarrow \text{Acc})}$ , is that the features of the latter get fully matched or interpreted locally, thus becoming syntactically inactive and invisible to external probing (“frozen in place”, as Chomsky puts it (2001: 6)). Quirky systems differ from accusative systems in this respect, arguably because quirky arguments do not get fully interpreted locally, but must match some relatively high feature in the clausal structure. Hence, the quirky argument raises, leaving the nominative behind:

- (58)  $\theta_{2(\rightarrow \text{Quirky})}$  [V  $\theta_{1(\rightarrow \text{Nom})}$ ]  $\rightarrow$  QUIRKY .... ~~QUIRKY~~ ... NOM

Thus, the nominative argument is the first argument merged in both accusative and quirky systems, but its order with respect to the second argument is reversed.

<sup>22</sup> Since the computation is entirely ‘dumb’ or ‘blind’, that is, does not ‘plan’ things (even though we can plan our sentences, which is a different but not an irrelevant issue). ‘The Nom/Acc problem’ might seem to be avoidable in a top-to-bottom approach (e.g. Phillips 2003, Bianchi and Chesi 2005), but, in fact, such an approach fares no better than a bottom-to-top approach. Thus, in a German clause beginning with a DP like *Peter*, the derivation would have to look ahead ‘downwards’, as it were, in order to know if the DP is an experiencer dative, a vocative (*Peter!*), a psych-accusative or a nominative.

The evidence I have presented in favor of this approach is strong, but it is also complicated, so I will not go through it here (but see Sigurðsson 2004b, 2006). What matters for our purposes is only the following two points:

- The cases themselves are not assigned until in morphology (an issue I'll return to)
- It is the argument that is merged first that gets assigned nominative in morphology

On the present relational approach, regular nominatives and accusatives function as to make a morphologically visible distinction between distinct arguments of a predicate. Hence, they do not depend on or match functional categories in the clausal structure and are thus truly non-structural, although they morphologically interpret or translate structural correlations. 'Nominative' and 'accusative' are simply traditional labels for the notions CASE1 versus CASE2. It follows, that there is no inherent connection between nominative and finite Tense, contra the most popular generative view on case (Chomsky 1981, etc.). That is, the alleged NOM-FINITE T CONNECTION is illusory (Sigurðsson 1989 and subsequent work; but see, e.g., Nomura 2005 for a somewhat different interpretation).

On this account, one would expect to find nominatives in infinitival constructions. However, they cannot be expected to show up in the subject position of PRO infinitives in, e.g., the Germanic languages, since that position may never be lexicalized, irrespective of case (Sigurðsson 1991). Thus, we have to look for different occurrences of infinitival nominatives. Three types come into question:

- A. Nominative subjects in infinitives that do allow subject lexicalization
- B. Nominative objects (quirky)
- C. Nominative predicative DPs

Icelandic is renowned for having certain *exceptional nominative case-marking* infinitives, (Sigurðsson 1989, 1996 and many others). Such infinitives allow nominative subjects (raised to the infinitival subject position or not), as well as regular nominative predicative DPs and quirky nominative objects:

- (59) a. *Mér hefur alltaf virst [Ólafur vera snjall maður].*  
 me.DAT has always seemed Olaf.NOM be clever man.NOM  
 'To me, Olaf has always seemed to be a clever man.'
- b. *Henni virtist [hafa leiðst strákarnir].*  
 her.DAT seemed have found-boring boys.the.NOM  
 'She seemed to have been bored by the boys.'
- c. *Það virtust [hafa verið veiddir fjórir laxar].*  
 there seemed have been caught four salmon.NOM  
 'There seemed to have been four salmon caught.'
- d. *Það voru taldir [hafa verið veiddir fjórir laxar].*  
 there were believed have been caught four salmon.NOM  
 'People believed there to have been four salmon caught.'

As we would expect, Icelandic also has nominative objects and predicative DPs in PRO infinitives:

- (60) a. *Hún vonaðist til [að leiðast ekki **allir** stákarnir].*  
 she hoped for to find-boring not all.NOM boys.the.NOM  
 ‘She hoped not to find all the boys boring.’  
 b. *Hún reyndi [að verða **prestur**].*  
 she tried to become priest.NOM  
 ‘She tried to become a priest.’  
 c. *[Að vilja verða **kennari**]!*  
 to want become teacher.NOM  
 ‘To want to become a teacher!’

Moreover, Icelandic has nominative floating quantifiers in infinitives, apparently agreeing in case with nominative PRO (Sigurðsson 1991):

- (61) a. *Strákarnir vonuðust til [að verða ekki **allir** reknir].*  
 boys.the.NOM hoped for to be not all.NOM fired  
 ‘The boys hoped not to all get fired.’  
 b. *Strákana langaði ekki til [að verða **allir** reknir].*  
 boys.the.ACC longed not for to be all.NOM fired  
 ‘The boys did not want to all get fired.’

As seen in (61b), with an accusative matrix subject, the matrix subject is not the source of the nominative of the quantifier. Rather, the source must be internal to the infinitive. – In all the examples in (59)-(61), accusative, dative or genitive forms instead of the bold-faced nominatives would be ungrammatical.<sup>23</sup>

Most of this evidence is unavailable in the other Germanic languages, as they lack the constructions bearing on the issue. One construction they all have, however, is the predicative DP construction. As we would expect, the predicate nominative languages generally apply nominative marking of predicative DPs in (non-ECM) infinitives as well as in finite clauses. This is illustrated below for standard German, Swedish and Afrikaans, in that order:

- (63) a. *Es reicht mir **ich**/\*mich zu sein.*  
 it suffices me I/\*me to be  
 ‘It is good enough for me to be myself.’  
 b. *Det räcker för mig att vara **jag**/\*mig.*  
 it suffices for me to be I/\*me  
 c. *Dit is vir my genoeg om **ek**/\*my te wees.*  
 it is for me enough COMP I/\*me to be

<sup>23</sup> Whereas the floating quantifier shows up in an oblique form if the infinitive has oblique PRO.

Interestingly, though, Dutch and Alemannic shift from nominative to accusative in (at least many) infinitives and so does e.g. Italian, as illustrated below, in that order:

- (64) a. *Dat ben ik.*  
           it is I  
       b. *Het is niet makkelijk om ?mij/\*ik te zijn.*  
           it is not easy COMP ?me/\*I to be  
           ‘It is not easy to be me.’
- (65) a. *Des bin ich.*  
           it is I  
       d. *Es langt mer, mich selber zum si.*<sup>24</sup>  
           it suffices me.DAT, me.ACC self to be
- (66) a. *Sono io/\*me.*  
           am I/\*me  
       b. *Mi basta essere me stessa.*  
           me.CL suffices be me.ACC myself.FEM.SG.

All this shows two things. First, there is no inherent or general Nom-Finite T Connection, that is, the common assumption that nominative case is dependent on finite tense is plainly wrong, based on the absence of evidence in case-poor predicate accusative languages like English. Second, however, languages that are developing from being predicate nominative into being predicate accusative languages of the English type, may opt for accusatives instead of nominatives in infinitival constructions, much as they may opt for accusatives specifically for weak third person pronouns (Dutch, West Frisian, Baden Alemannic), for reflexive predicative DPs (Swedish, Graubünden Alemannic), or even for full DPs as opposed to pronominal DPs (Ruhr-German). Thus, again, we see interesting evidence that a historical change may develop along different paths in different languages (and in different varieties of ‘a’ language).

The inherent cases are ‘semantically linked’ (Chomsky 2002: 113). As mentioned above, however, the semantics in question is not lexical semantics but syntactic semantics, as it were. That is, the inherent cases generally seem *not* to match or link to features of lexical roots, but rather to syntactic-semantic features, for instance aspectual features and voice features. Plausibly, such features are syntactic, being interpreted at both the interfaces, that is, semantically at the conceptual interface but by case in the morphology (‘deep PF’) of case languages. If so, the inherent cases are ‘structural’, in a sense. In contrast, the relational or so-called ‘structural cases’ are not semantically linked, and they are not structurally linked either, that is, they are not related to or licensed by functional categories like Tense, Aspect, etc. Their sole function is to be morphologically distinctive (Sigurðsson 2003), that is, they make an overt, morphological distinction between *distinct event participants* (‘arguments’), PARTICIPANT1 versus PARTICIPANT2, the first being assigned CASE1 and the latter being assigned CASE2 – in morphology. In other words, the ‘virtue’ of the relational cases is that of making an overt distinction, for communicative and processing purposes, and not that of expressing any semantic-syntactic functions.

<sup>24</sup> Baden Alemannic, Markus Benzinger, p.c. However, Benzinger also tells me that the nominative is possible or even preferred for at least some infinitival predicative DPs, perhaps because of a pressure from standard German. – Graubünden Alemannic also shifts from nominative to accusative in infinitives like (65d) (Philipp Konzett, p.c.).

#### 4 The nature of the predicative Nom/Acc variation

Predicative constructions involve only one event participant (viewed from two angles, though). Thus, it is not surprising that many languages do not make any case distinction between DPs and their predicates. Instead, case-rich languages commonly apply *case agreement* in predicative constructions. This is illustrated below for the case-rich Germanic languages; the underlined subjects are all nominative:

- (67) a. Er ist **ein guter Schüler** / \**einen guten Schüler*. German  
 he is a good student.NOM / \*ACC  
 b. Er iz **a guter shiler** / \**a gutn shiler*. Yiddish  
 he is a good student.NOM / \*ACC  
 c. Hann er **góður nemandi** / \**góðan nemanda*. Icelandic  
 he is good student.NOM / \*ACC  
 d. Hann er **ein góður stúdentur** / \**góðan stúdent*. Faroese  
 he is a good student.NOM / \*ACC

Ancient Greek and Latin also applied this case copying or case agreement strategy for predicates, whereas some other case-rich languages, including Finnish, Polish and Russian, have a mixed system of case agreement versus a special predicative case (partitive in Finnish, instrumental in Polish and Russian), depending on factors that I cannot go into here (but see, e.g., Karlsson 1985: 98ff, Comrie 1997, Bailyn 2001).

Predicative case agreement is not confined to finite clauses or to nominative case. This is partly illustrated for Icelandic below:

- (68) a. Hún er **góður prestur**.  
 she.NOM is good priest.NOM  
 ‘She is a good priest.’  
 b. *Við teljum* hana vera **góðan prest**.  
 we consider her.ACC be good priest.ACC  
 ‘We consider her to be a good priest.’  
 c. *Við kynntumst* henni sem **góðum presti**.  
 we got-to-know her.DAT as good priest.DAT  
 ‘We got to know her as a good priest.’  
 d. *Við leituðum* til hennar sem **góðs prests**.  
 we sought to her.GEN as good priest.GEN  
 ‘We confided in her as a good priest.’

English type accusative marking of predicative DPs seems to be highly exceptional in case-rich languages (i.e., languages that have some case-marking of full DPs). That is, case-rich languages quite generally seem to apply either case agreement in predicative constructions or a special predicative case. As we saw above, Ruhr-German and Allemannic varieties are exceptional in this respect, and Standard Arabic is another language with case-marking of full DPs and (some) Acc predicates (see Benmamoun 2000: 43), but these are the only exceptions I am aware of. Thus it seems that we can formulate the following tentative ‘Greenbergian type’ universal (for finite constructions):

- (69) With much greater than chance frequency, *case-rich languages do not assign accusative case to predicative nominals*



On the present approach to the relational cases, this tendency is a rather natural one. Assigning object case to predicative DPs is incompatible with the basic function of the relational cases, that of making a morphological distinction between distinct arguments or event participants. In many case-rich languages, not only predicative DPs but also adjectival and participial predicates agree in case, as illustrated below for Icelandic (the same was true of, e.g., Latin and Ancient Greek):

- (70) a. *Hún* var *snjöll* / *kosin*.  
           she.nom was clever.NOM.F.SG / elected.NOM.F.SG  
       b. *Við töldum hana hafa verið snjalla* / *kosna*.  
           we believed her.ACC have been clever.ACC.F.SG / elected.ACC.F.SG

In a system like this, going from case agreement in predicates to general accusative marking would be a major change.<sup>25</sup> In case-poor languages, on the other hand, accusative marking of predicates is a peripheral phenomenon, since it affects only a fraction of all predicates, namely those rare predicates that consist of pronominal DPs/NPs.

On the popular assumption that the relational cases are syntactic elements or features (Chomsky 2000, etc.), predicative accusatives in languages like English and Danish are left unaccounted for. The literature on the English predicative construction is of course enormously voluminous (see Quinn 2005a), but it is truly amazing how little interest the Germanic predicative Nom/Acc variation has raised within generative approaches to case (with Maling and Sprouse 1995 as an exception). As mentioned in section 2.3, the reason is presumably that syntactic approaches to the relational cases have little or nothing to say about this variation: it is unexpected and mysterious under such approaches. Assuming that predicative accusatives in English, Danish, Norwegian and North Frisian, is ‘default’ (see some of the references in Maling and Sprouse 1995: 167 and the discussion in Schütze 2001) is not insightful either. If accusative is ‘default’ in the English type of languages, then nominative must in some sense be ‘non-default’ or marked, which would imply that these languages should be unique among the languages of the world in assigning a marked case to subjects (in finite clauses) across the board.

Under the present, morphological approach to the relational cases, on the other hand, the Germanic predicative case variation results from a simple and a ‘reasonable’ historical change. Languages like English and Danish have extended the distinctive function of the relational cases from arguments to DPs in general, that is, case-marking in these languages is not mysterious or due to grammatical diseases but well-behaved, at least by and large. We can describe this informally in terms of the following rules or directives of the two different grammars, stated in (71). I refer to the grammars as ‘Grammar *q*’ and ‘Grammar *w*’, abstaining from calling them ‘Grammar 1’ and ‘Grammar 2’, because, as we have seen, evidence from related languages suggests that these stages have been separated by several intermediate grammars, with the change from *q* to *w* only partly completed:

- (71) *Grammar q*: Apply Nom/Acc to morphologically distinguish between the first and the second **argument** of a predicate.  
       *Grammar w*: Apply Nom/Acc to morphologically distinguish between the first and the second **DP** of a predicate.

<sup>25</sup> In West-Germanic varieties, in contrast, only predicate DPs get case marked. Thus, the above mentioned accusative marking of certain predicates in Ruhr-Germanic and Alemannic varieties is not nearly as pervasive a change as accusative marking of predicates would be in a language like Icelandic.

However, Grammar *w* is evidently not the end-point of the development, as suggested by the fact that many speakers of both English and Danish tend to make a case distinction between *adjacent* DPs in general, even conjoined DPs, as in *him and I*, *ham og jeg*, etc. (e.g. in the subject function as in *Him and I went home*, *Ham og jeg gik hjem*).<sup>26</sup> Even though this is generally considered to be substandard in English (see Huddleston, Pullum, et al. 2002: 462ff), it is evidently frequent in the spoken language (Quinn 2005a, 2005b).

Many factors interact with the basic function of the relational cases in the English/Danish type of languages (see Henry 1995 and Quinn 2005b on Belfast English versus New Zealand English).<sup>27</sup> Thus, as studied by Quinn, the relevant factors in English include, e.g., the distinction between weak and strong pronouns and the phonological ‘heaviness’ or ‘robustness’ of strong pronouns. Similarly, many factors, above all the inherent cases, interfere with the basic function of the relational cases in the Icelandic type of languages. The fundamental difference between these language types with respect to the distribution of Nom/Acc, however, is that the English/Danish type has extended the distinctive function of the relational cases from arguments to DPs as such.

## 5 Conclusion

The ‘language’ of Narrow Syntax is *understandable but foreign* to both the interfaces (or, if one likes, to the articulatory and conceptual organs). That is, the interfaces *do not* ‘speak Narrow Syntax’, they interpret it and translate it into their ‘own languages’.

This is perhaps not so clear if one only considers morphologically poor languages like English. However, a simple comparison of English with a language like Icelandic immediately reveals that some languages have an extremely complex morphophonological component that is largely absent from analytic languages like English. Consider the following rather simple examples (N, A = nominative, accusative, M.PL = masculine plural):

- (72) a. *Allir þessir dómara voru taldir verða útnefndir.*  
 all these judges were believed be nominated  
 N.M.PL N.M.PL N.M.PL IND.3PL N.M.PL N.M.PL  
 ‘All these judges were believed to be nominated.’
- b. *Við töldum alla þessa dómara verða útnefnda.*  
 we believed all these judges be nominated  
 N IND.1PL A.M.PL A.M.PL A.M.PL A.M.PL  
 ‘We believed all these judges to be nominated.’

Icelandic and English are relatively closely related languages, but the morphological differences between them are tremendous. Some of these differences can be seen as resulting from Icelandic being explicit about categories that English is ‘cool’ or reluctant about expressing. Thus, English arguably has a syntactic-semantic distinction between ‘subjunctive’ and ‘indicative’, although it mostly keeps quiet about it in its morphology. In contrast, it is not clear that the abundant case and agreement morphology of Icelandic is

<sup>26</sup> See Johannessen (1998) for a discussion of this phenomenon in some other languages, including Norwegian.

<sup>27</sup> Conjoined subjects like *Him and I* have agreement correlates in Belfast English as described by Henry (1995), in contrast to New Zealand English, where conjoined subjects always seem to trigger plain plural agreement, regardless of case and other factors (*Him and I have ...*, *Me and him have ...*, etc.; Heidi Quinn, p.c.). This fact about New Zealand English suggests that the nominative-verb agreement connection observed in many languages is a more superficial phenomenon than often assumed (see Sigurðsson 2003 and subsequent work on this connection in Icelandic morphology).

telling us something about the syntactic-semantic structure of both languages that English is being silent about. Icelandic explicitly distinguishes between full DP arguments by relational case-marking, as in (72), but this distinction is evidently an unnecessary extravagance.<sup>28</sup> The agreement in case, number and gender is even less meaningful, that is, it arguably arises through feature copying processes in ('deep PF') morphology (as argued in Sigurðsson 2004b). From a linguistic point of view, this copying is morphological noise. It probably has the socially important function of signaling the group identity of speakers, but it has arguably no linguistic function. If it had, we would expect English to be seriously inferior to Icelandic. That does not seem to be the case.

The present study highlights the fact that morphological case *interprets* syntax in its own terms or its own 'language' rather than directly expressing or mirroring it. Thus, to mention only one of the many case contrasts we have seen, there is arguably no Narrow Syntax difference between, e.g., Danish *Det er os* ('it is us') and its Swedish translation *Det är vi* ('it is we'). Rather, *exactly* the same syntactic structure gets different interpretations in morphology.

We need to return to the traditional view that case is a morphological (PF) phenomenon.<sup>29</sup> Both relational and inherent cases are morphological *translations* or interpretations of syntactic structures, but they are not present or active in syntax themselves, that is, there are no NOM or ACC features in syntax (or DAT or GEN, for that matter). All the alleged syntactic effects of relational or 'structural' case stem from matching of *interpretable* features, typically PERSON and NUMBER in accusative systems (Sigurðsson 2003, 2004a, 2004b, etc.) but often ASPECT, TENSE or FOCUS in different systems (cf. Miyagawa to appear). NOM and ACC as such are nonexistent in Narrow Syntax. It is thus no wonder that they are invisible to the semantic interface (as discussed by Chomsky 2000, 2001, 2002, etc.).

This entails that the overt morphophonological forms of languages are only indirect and incomplete reflections of the language faculty (reminding of Plato's cave allegory). The inevitable conclusion, unwelcome and distressing as it may be, is that there is no such thing as 'plain, overt evidence' in syntax. The study of syntax is a much more difficult task than most of us would like to believe, demanding that we compare a range of languages and 'listen' to the semantic interpretation of syntax no less than to its widely differing morphological translations. If a category does not get a semantic interpretation in any of the languages we study, then it is probably just a language specific morphological (PF) category, with the basic function of making an overt distinction, a noble and useful enough function as such. Like a phoneme.

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<sup>28</sup> Or else we should find such marking in all languages. It has sometimes been suggested that Icelandic case-marking is 'decorative', as opposed to case-marking in related languages. This is rather obviously wrong. Case-marking in all languages is 'useful' or functional from a parsing/processing point of view – but unnecessary or 'decorative' from a strictly linguistic or grammatical point of view (i.e. it is not indispensable for a message to get through). Icelandic case-marking is clearly no different from e.g. Latin, German or Russian case-marking in this respect.

<sup>29</sup> See also Sigurðsson 2004b for a parallel conclusion regarding gender and number, arguing that we must distinguish syntactic-semantic gender and number from their morphological translations, that is, from formal gender and number.

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