

A Comparison of Language Complexity in Faroese and Icelandic

SIGMUND VESTERGAARD – B00108126

Institute of Technology Blanchardstown

We examine the complexity of Icelandic compared to Faroese, which are two closely related North Germanic languages. It is found that Icelandic is more complex than Faroese, and evidence is presented that shows that while inflection of nouns, agreement of case, number, and gender is similar for both languages, verb inflection in Icelandic is much richer than it is in Faroese. As an example we can mentioned case patterns for objects of ditransitive verbs, where Icelandic has a significant number of pattern combinations while Faroese predominantly has the dative–accusative pattern, and in some cases accusative–accusative.

Keywords: Complexity, Faroese, Icelandic

1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper we introduce the two Germanic languages of Icelandic and Faroese and present aspects of their morphology and syntax, respectively, with a view to comparing the complexity of the two.

First we briefly introduce both languages, putting them in context. Then we move on to analysis of Icelandic morphology and syntax. Finally we do the same for Faroese while referring back to the analysis of Icelandic, which should give us an idea of the similarities and differences, respectively, between the two languages. The examples and accompanying analysis for Faroese are drawn from (Thráinsson et al. 2012), while for Icelandic we mostly draw on (Thráinsson 2007).

The hypothesis we wish to explore in this paper is the following:

- (1) Icelandic is essentially more complex than Faroese, because Faroese has developed further away from Old Norse than Icelandic has.

1.1. Icelandic

Icelandic developed from the Old Norse spoken by the settlers that arrived from Norway in the late ninth and early tenth century. Today it is primarily spoken by around 335,000 inhabitants in Iceland and is most closely related to the other Nordic languages, Faroese, Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish, but more so to Faroese and the dialects of southwestern Norway than the others.

Normally the history of Icelandic is divided into the Old Icelandic period, before 1540, and the Modern Icelandic period, after 1540. The dividing line

of 1540 is the year the first Icelandic translation of the New Testament was published.

When Modern Icelandic, which is what we will concern ourselves with in this paper, is compared with other Nordic languages on one hand, and Old Norse on the other, it is evident that Icelandic has changed less than the other Modern Scandinavian languages with respect to morphology and syntax (Thráinsson 2007, 1994).

1.2. *Faroese*

Faroese is derived from the Norse language of the primarily Norwegian settlers who moved to the islands in the ninth century. Due to a lack of Viking Age and medieval sources little is known about the development of Faroese into the language we know today. Nothing of substance was written in Faroese until the 1770s, by which time most the features of the modern language must have developed.

From the Reformation in 1539 until 1948 Faroese had no official status, which has had several consequences for Faroese. The spoken language is mostly dialectically based and its lexicon is heavily influenced by Danish. On the other hand the written language is homogeneous and very puristic. The orthography was only established in the middle of the nineteenth century, and owes much to Old Norse and some to Icelandic. Neologisms are widespread in Faroese, as they are in Icelandic, but many of them are only used in writing, with the spoken language preferring variants derived from Danish (Barnes & Weyhe 1994).

2. ICELANDIC

In this section we go through the main grammatical categories, nominal and verbal, and give a brief overview.

2.1. *Nominal categories*

Icelandic has a three-valued gender system, masculine, feminine, and neuter. Grammatical gender is not necessarily inferred from the sex of the referents. Most nouns referring to females are feminine, for example, but it is also possible to find masculine and neuter words referring to females. It is also possible for words referring to things and concepts to be either masculine, feminine, or neuter. We list some examples here (Thráinsson 2007):

- (2) (a) strákur (m) 'boy', stóll (m) 'chair', svanni (m) 'woman (poetic)'
- (b) stelpa (f) 'girl', mynd (f) 'picture', hetja (f) 'hero'
- (c) barn (n) 'child', borð (n) 'table', fljóð (n) 'woman (poetic)', skáld (n) 'poet'

Nominal categories, such as nouns, adjectives, articles and pronouns, have four cases, nominative (N), accusative (A), dative (D), and genitive (G), and two

numbers, singular (sg.) and plural (pl.). The inflection of nouns varies according to gender and inflectional class of the noun. Both attributive and predicative adjectives agree with gender, case and number of the noun they modify. Let's look at some examples (Thráinsson 2007):

- (3) (a) *gular* *hestur* *gul* *mynd*
yellow.N.SG.M horse.N.SG.M yellow.N.SG.F picture.N.SG.F
gult *borð* *gular* *myndir*
yellow.N.SG.N table.N.SG.N yellow.N.PL.F pictures.N.PL.F
- (b) *Ég sá gula hænu*
I saw yellow.ACC.SG.F hen.ACC.SG.F
'I saw a yellow hen'
- (c) *Þessar hænur eru gular*
These hens.N.PL.F are yellow.N.PL.F

Icelandic does not have an indefinite article, and the definite article is suffixed to nouns according to their gender, noun, and case, as illustrated here (Thráinsson 2007):

- (4) *hest-ur-inn* *mynd-in* *borð-ið*
horse.NOM.SG.M.DEF picture.NOM.SG.F.DEF table.NOM.SG.N.DEF
'the horse' ; 'the picture' ; 'the table'

2.2. Verbal categories

Finite verbs in Icelandic agree with nominal subjects in person and number. Just as we saw with nouns, the morphological markers for person and number appear to be fused; or at least very difficult to separate, although it can be argued that person and number are distinct syntactic categories in Icelandic after all (Thráinsson 2007: 8). Here are examples of inflection of two different verbs, *horfa* (look) and *bíta* (bite), where the former is an example of a weak (regular) verb and the latter is an example of a strong (irregular) verb (Thráinsson 2007):

- (5) (a) *ég horf-i* *ég horf-ð-i*
I look.1.SG.PRS.IND I look.1.SG.PST.IND
'I look' 'I looked'
- (b) *þú horf-ir* *þú horf-ð-ir*
you look.2.SG.PRS.IND you look.2.SG.PST.IND
'you look' 'you looked'
- (c) *hann horf-ir* *hann horf-ð-i*
he look.3.SG.PRS.IND he look.3.SG.PST.IND
'he looks' 'he looked'

- (d) við horf-um við horf-ð-um
 we look.1SG.PRS.IND we look.1.SG.PL.IND
 'we look' 'we looked'
- (e) þið horf-ið þið horf-ð-uð
 you.PL look.2.SG.PRS.IND you.PL look.2.PL.PST.IND
 'you look' 'you looked'
- (f) þeir horf-a þeir horf-ð-u
 they.M look.3.SG.PRS.IND they.M look.3.PL.PST.IND
 'they look' 'they looked'
- (6) (a) ég bít ég beit
 I bite.1SG.PRS.IND I bite.1.SG.PST.IND
 'I bite' 'I bit'
- (b) þú bít-ur þú bei-st
 you bite.2.SG.PRS.IND you bite.2.SG.PST.IND
 'you bite' 'you bit'
- (c) hann bít-ur hann beit
 he bite.3.SG.PRS.IND he bite.3.SG.PST.IND
 'he bites' 'he bit'
- (d) við bít-um við bit-um
 I bite.1PL.PRS.IND I bite.1.PL.PST.IND
 'I bite' 'I bit'
- (e) þið bít-ið þið bit-uð
 you bite.2.PL.PRS.IND you bite.2.PL.PST.IND
 'you bite' 'you bit'
- (f) þeir bít-a þeir bit-u
 he bite.3.PL.PRS.IND he bite.3.PL.PST.IND
 'he bites' 'he bit'

Icelandic has two distinct tenses, an unmarked *present* tense and *past* tense. As is usually the case for Germanic languages, the past tense of weak verbs is marked with a dental suffix while strong verbs show various (systematic but unpredictable) vowel changes (ablaut patterns). The rich agreement morphology illustrated in examples (4) and (5) above is one of the main differences between Icelandic and other Scandinavian languages, and it should be noted that it is found both in indicative (as shown in the examples above) and subjunctive mood (as shown in the examples below) (Thráinsson 2007):

- (7) (a) ég horf-i ég horf-ð-i
 I look.1SG.PRS.SUBJ I look.1.SG.PST.SUBJ
 'I look' 'I looked'

- (b) þú horf-ir þú horf-ð-ir
 you look.2.SG.PRS.SUBJ you look.2.SG.PST.SUBJ
 'you look' 'you looked'
- (c) hann horf-i hann horf-ð-i
 he look.3.SG.PRS.SUBJ he look.3.SG.PST.SUBJ
 'he looks' 'he looked'
- (d) við horf-um við horf-ð-um
 we look.1SG.PRS.SUBJ we look.1.SG.PL.SUBJ
 'we look' 'we looked'
- (e) þið horf-ið þið horf-ð-uð
 you.PL look.2.SG.PRS.SUBJ you.PL look.2.PL.PST.SUBJ
 'you look' 'you looked'
- (f) þeir horf-i þeir horf-ð-u
 they.M look.3.SG.PRS.SUBJ they.M look.3.PL.PST.SUBJ
 'they look' 'they looked'
- (8) (a) ég bít-i ég bit-i
 I bite.1SG.PRS.SUBJ I bite.1.SG.PST.SUBJ
 'I bite' 'I bit'
- (b) þú bít-ir þú bit-ir
 you bite.2.SG.PRS.SUBJ you bite.2.SG.PST.SUBJ
 'you bite' 'you bit'
- (c) hann bít-i hann bit-i
 he bite.3.SG.PRS.SUBJ he bite.3.SG.PST.SUBJ
 'he bites' 'he bit'
- (d) við bít-um við bit-um
 I bite.1PL.PRS.SUBJ I bite.1.PL.PST.SUBJ
 'I bite' 'I bit'
- (e) þið bít-ið þið bit-uð
 you bite.2.PL.PRS.SUBJ you bite.2.PL.PST.SUBJ
 'you bite' 'you bit'
- (f) þeir bít-i þeir bit-u
 he bite.3.PL.PRS.SUBJ he bite.3.PL.PST.SUBJ
 'he bites' 'he bit'

The non-finite verb forms in Modern Icelandic are 1) *infinitive* and 2) the two *participles*, *past* and *present*. Infinitive typically ends with *-a* in Icelandic, as we can see from this comparison with imperative:

- (9) infinitives: tala horf-a dæm-a bít-a
 imperatives: tala horf dæm bít
 'talk' 'look' 'judge' 'bite'

Present participle is formed by adding *-(a)ndi* to the stem of the verb, e.g. *sofandi* 'sleeping', *gangandi* 'walking', and does not inflect in Modern Icelandic.

Past participle usually ends in *-ur* or *-inn* and inflects in gender, number, and case, as illustrated here:

- (10) dæm-d-ur dæm-d dæm-t
 judge.1NOM.SG.M judge.1NOM.SG.F judge.1NOM.SG.N
- dæm-d-an dæm-d-a dæm-t
 judge.1ACC.SG.M judge.1ACC.SG.F judge.1ACC.SG.N
- dæm-d-ir dæm-d-ar dæm-d
 judge.1NOM.PL.M judge.1NOM.PL.F judge.1NOM.PL.N
- dæm-d-a dæm-d-ar dæm-d
 judge.1ACC.PL.M judge.1ACC.PL.F judge.1ACC.PL.N
- 'judged'

The past participle is used in passive constructions, as shown here:

- (11) Hundurinn var bitinn
 dog.3NOM.SG.M.DEF be.AUX bite.3NOM.SG.M.PST.PTCP
 'The dog was bitten'
- (12) Bækurnar voru lesnar
 book.3NOM.PL.F.DEF be.AUX read.3NOM.PL.F.PST.PTCP

Above we have seen examples with the auxiliary verb *vera* 'be'. Auxiliary verbs in Icelandic do not form a separate inflectional class, but show the same rich agreement morphology and inflection for tense as other verbs, hence can only be defined as 'the class of verbs that are used to systematically express grammatical categories' such as passive, perfect, progressive, and various modal constructions (Thráinsson 2007: 10).

As we have seen before, the passive is formed by the auxiliaries *vera* 'be' and *verða* 'become' plus a past participle. We have also shown above that the passive auxiliary agrees with a nominative subject in person and number, and with the participle in number and gender. The agent of a passive can be expressed with the preposition *af* 'by' plus dative, but normally is left unexpressed:

- (13) Einhver opnaði skápinn.
 somebody.3NOM.SG open.3SG.PST cupboard.ACC.SG.DET
 'Somebody opened the cupboard.'

- (14) Skápurinn var opnaður.
 cupboard.NOM.SG.M.DET be.3SG.PST open.NOM.SG.M.PST.PTCP
 'The cupboard was opened.'

Additionally we have the so-called middle forms, which are verb forms ending in *-st*, that have a passive-like meaning:

- (15) Skápurinn opnaðist.
 cupboard.NOM.SG.M.DET open.NOM.SG.M.PST.PTCP
 'The cupboard opened.'

There is no understood agent in *-st* constructions, such that a sentence like this is ungrammatical in Icelandic:

- (16) *Naglarnir framleiðast av Vírneti hf.
 nail.NOM.SG.DET produce.SG by.PREP Virnet Inc.

The *perfect* in Icelandic is formed by the auxiliary *hafa* 'have' and an uninflected past participle of the main verb, as seen in the examples below. We will refer to the uninflected past participle as *supine*, but it is identical to the singular nominative/accusative of the participle:

- (17) (a) María hefur aldrei lesið þessa
 Maria have.3SG.PST.AUX never read.SUP this.DET
 bók.
 book.NOM.SG.F
 'Maria has never read this book.'
- (b) Pósturinn hefur ekki komið í morgun.
 mail.SG.DET have.3SG.PST.AUX not come.SUP in morning
 'The mail has not arrived this morning.'
- (c) Þessi bók hefur aldrei verið
 this book have.3SG.PST.AUX never be.SUP
 lesin.
 read.PST.PTCP.NOM.F
 'This book has never been read.'

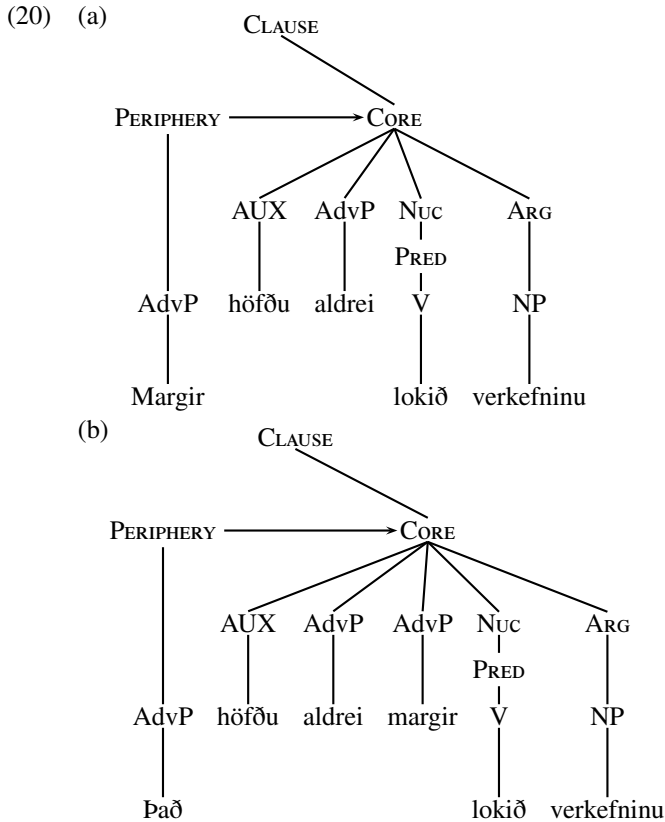
In Icelandic a *progressive* aspect is expressed by using the auxiliary *vera* 'be' with the infinitive of the main verb (including the infinitive marker *að*):

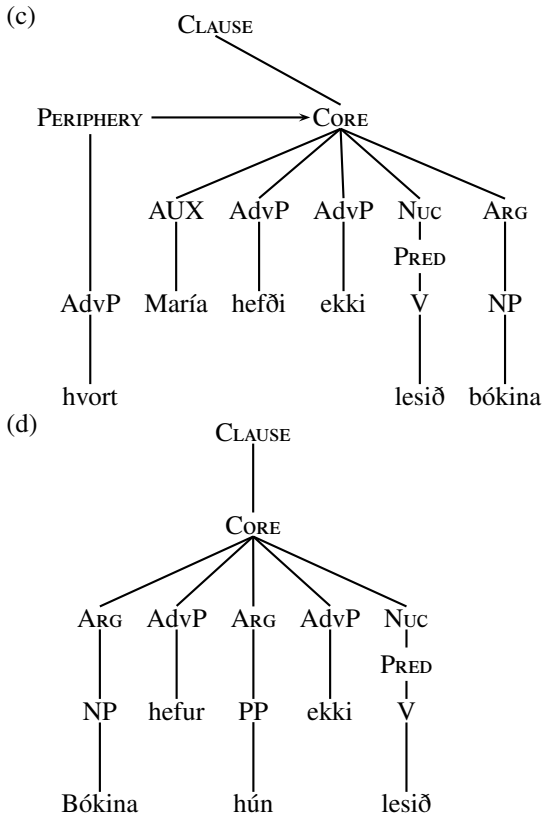
- (18) Ég var að borða morgunmatinn þegar hún kom.
 I be.1SG.PSTIND to eat.INF breakfastACC.DET when she arrive.PST
 'I was eating breakfast when she arrived.'

2.3. Syntax

We illustrate word order and clause structure in Icelandic by representing some sample sentences from (Thráinsson 2007: 17-18) as RRG trees. First we gloss the sentences, then we draw the trees.

- (19) (a) Margir höfðu aldrei lokið
 many.ADV have.PST.AUX never.ADV finish.PST.PTCP
 verkefninu
 assignment-DET
 'Many had never finished the assignment'
- (b) Það höfðu aldrei margir lokið verkefninu
 there have never many.ADV finish.PST.PTCP assignment-DET
 'There were never many people who had finished the assignment'
- (c) hvort María hefði ekki lesið bókina
 whether Maria have not.NEG read.PST.PTCP book-DET
 'whether Maria has not read the book'
- (d) Bókina hefur hún ekki lesið
 book-DET have.PST.AUX she not read
 'She has not read the book'





3. FAROESE

Following the overview of Icelandic morphology and syntax we take a similar look at Faroese. We start with nominal categories before we move on to verbal categories.

3.1. Nominal categories

Like Icelandic, Faroese has three grammatical genders; masculine, feminine, and neuter. Faroese nouns inflect for gender, but also number (singular/plural) and case (nominative/accusative/dative/genitive). The inflectional endings vary according to gender. Definiteness of nouns is indicated by a suffixed article.

Just like nouns, adjectives also inflect for number, case, and gender. Additionally they also inflect for degree (positive/comparative/superlative). Adjectives typically have two forms of inflections - strong or weak - depending on the definiteness of the noun phrase they are a part of.

Finally, articles, pronouns, the cardinal numbers 1 to 3, and the ordinal numbers, inflect for number, case, and gender.

Faroese noun phrases show extensive agreement, including number agreement between nouns and the adjectives that modify them. This holds for both attributive and predicative adjectives. We illustrate this using the noun *drongur* 'boy' with the adjective *klókur* 'smart' (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 61):

- (21) ein klókur drongur klókir drongir
 a smart boy smart boy
 'a smart boy' 'smart boys'
- drongurin er klókur dreingirnir eru klókir
 boy-DET is smart boy-DET,PL is.PL smart.PL
- 'the boy is smart' 'the boys are smart'

The gender of nouns is reflected in the different forms of the personal pronouns used to refer to them and the gender of adjectives and articles used to modify said nouns. We illustrate this with the following example:

- (22) Hetta er ein klókur drongur
 this is a.M smart.M boy.M
 Hann. er klókur
 he.M is smart.M

Hetta er ein klók genta
 this is a.F smart.F girl.F

Hon er klók
 she.F is smart.F

Hetta er eitt klókt barn
 this is a.N smart.N child.N

Tað er klókt
 it.N is smart.N

Old Norse and older Faroes had four morphologically distinctive cases - nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive - but only the three first are productive in modern spoken Faroese (modern *written* Faroese still retains the genitive to a degree). We illustrate this with a small example:

- (23) Gentan svav
 girl-DET.NOM sleep.PST
 'The girl slept'

Eg sá gentuna
I see.PST girl-DET.ACC

'I saw the girl'

Hetta er hundurin hjá gentuni
This is dog-DET with girl-DET.DAT

'This is the girl's dog'

Despite this a genitive form can be produced for nouns and personal pronouns, but less so for adjectives. The genitive form of personal pronouns is widely used while the genitive form of many nouns is found in fixed expressions and as the first part of certain compounds, but it is uncertain whether speakers intuitively interpret these forms as genitive (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 62).

Instead of genitive, modern spoken Faroese prefers prepositional constructions involving a dative form of the noun as illustrated in these examples:

- (24) Her eru húsini hjá einum ríkum manni
here is.PL house-DET.PL with a.DAT rich.DAT man.DAT
'Here is a rich man's house/home'

Kettlingurin hjá kettuni hjá mær er vakur
kitten-DET with cat-DET.DAT with I.DAT is beautiful

'My cat's kitten is beautiful'

Above we saw examples with the preposition *hjá* 'with', but Faroese speakers also use other prepositions with the dative, depending on the semantic function. We'll look at some examples (Thráinsson et al. 2012):

- (25) takið á húsinum motorurin í
roof-DET.NOM.N on house-DET.DAT.N motor-DET.NOM.M in
bilinum
car-DET.DAT.M

'the roof of the house' 'the car's engine'

abbi at dreinginum aldurin á kirkjuni
grandfather to boy-DET.M.DAT age-DETON church-DET.DAT

'the boy's grandfather' 'the age of the church'

halin á kúnni tenninar í
tail-DETON cow-DET.DAT tooth-DET.PL in dog-DET.DAT
hundinum

'the cow's tail' 'the dog's teeth'

høvdið á mær eyguni í honum
 head-DETON I.DAT eyes-DET in he.DAT

'my head' 'his eyes'

With nouns denoting family relationships an accusative form is normally used instead of genitive or a prepositional phrase as illustrated here:

- (26) pápi dreingin mamma gentuna beiggi Jógvan
 father boy-DET.ACC mum girl-DET.ACC brother Jógvan.ACC
 'the boy's father' 'the girl's mother' 'Jógvan's brother'

As mentioned above, adjectives can be grouped into two categories: *strong* adjectives and *weak* adjectives. Which category they belong to depends on the definiteness of the noun phrase they form a part of. The general rule is that the adjective takes the weak form if the noun phrase is definite, and the strong form if the noun phrase is indefinite. We illustrate this with two examples (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 65):

- (27) (a) Hetta er ein stórir bilur og ein
 this is a big.NOM.SG.M car.NOM.SG.M and a
 lítil bók.
 small.NOM.SG.F book.NOM.SG.F
 'This is a big car and a small book'
- (b) Hetta er tann stóri bilurin og tann
 this is the big.NOM.SG.M car-DET.NOM.SG.M and the
 lítla bókin.
 small-DET.NOM.SG.F book
 'This is the big car and the small book'

Finally, most adjectives can be inflected for degree by adding the suffixes *-(a)r* and *-(a)st* in comparative and superlative, respectively. Indeclinable adjectives express difference in degree by using the auxiliary verbs *meiri* 'more' (comparative) and *mest* 'most' (superlative). We'll finish by showing a couple of examples of this:

- (28) (a) gulur gul-a-ri gul-ast-ur
 yellow yellower yellowest
- (b) hóskandi meiri hóskandi mest hóskandi
 appropriate more appropriate most appropriate

3.2. Verbal categories

Faroese verbs are inflected by person, number, and tense, with the two following characteristics with respect to person inflection (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 67):

1. Faroese verbs do not show any person distinctions in the plural and regular (weak).
2. Faroese verbs do not show any person distinctions neither in the singular nor in the past tense.

This can be illustrated with the following example:

- (29) (a) eg kalli tú kallar hann/hon/tað kallar
 I call.1SG.PRS you call.2SG.PRS he/she/it call.3SG.PRS
 'I call' 'you call' 'he/she/it calls'
- (b) vit kalla tit kalla teir/tær/tey kalla
 we call.1PL.PRS you.PL call.2PL.PRS they.M/F/N call.3PL.PRS
 'we call' 'you call' 'they call'
- (c) eg kallaði tú kallaði hann/hon/tað kallaði
 I call.1SG.PST you call.2SG.PST he/she/it call.3SG.PST
 'I called' 'you called' 'he/she/it called'

Faroese has two distinct imperative forms, plural and singular, as illustrated here:

- (30) Gev/gevið hesum manninum gætur!
 give.SG/PL this man-DET.3SGDAT attention
 'Give attention to this man!'

The singular *gev* would be used if addressing one person, and the plural *gevið* if more than one person is being addressed. There was no distinctive plural imperative in Old Norse, where the 2PL indicative had this role, but in Faroese there is a distinction between the default finite forms and the imperative forms. We illustrate this below, where the non-imperative forms are referred to as *indicative*, although it is uncertain that one can speak of indicative in Faroese, because there is no productive contrasting subjunctive in Faroese (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 67-68):

- (31) (a) Tú fert til hús.
 you.2SG go.2SG.PRS.IND to house
 'You go home'
- (b) Far til hús!
 go.2SG.IMP to house
 'Go home!'
- (c) Tit fara til hús.
 you.2PL go.2PL.PRS.IND to house
 'You go home'
- (d) Farið til hús!
 go.2PL.IMP to house
 'Go home!'

We mentioned above that the subjunctive is not productive in Faroese anymore, and it should be added that only a few relic forms exist in main clauses in relatively fixed expressions and in religious language. And where they exist they almost exclusively express *optative modality*, as illustrated below (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 68):

- (32) (a) Jesus fylgir tær
 Jesus follow.3SG.IND you
 'Jesus is with you'
- (b) Jesus fylgi tær
 Jesus follow.3SG.SUBJ you
 'Jesus be with you'
- (c) Gud signar Føroyar
 God bless.3PL.IND Faroes
 'God blesses the Faroes'
- (d) Gud signi Føroyar
 God bless.3PL.SUBJ Faroes
 'God bless the Faroes'

Examples of other, relatively fixed optative forms, which aren't religious expressions, are:

- (33) (a) Hann leingi livi!
 He long live.3SG.SUBJ
 'Long live he!'
- (b) Gævi at tað skjótt varð heystfrí!
 Give.3SG.PST.SUBJ that it soon become.SG.PST autumn break
 'I wish we had autumn break soon!'
- (c) Hevði tað nú bara gingist henni væl.
 Have.3SG.PST.SUBJ it now just go.SG.PST her well
 'I wish things would go well for her'

Of these the first one uses the present subjunctive while the two others use the past subjunctive (or what was the past subjunctive in older Faroese).

Typically the passive is formed with the auxiliary verbs *verða* 'be, become' and *blíva* 'be, become'. The participle agree in case, gender, and number with a nominative subject, and the agent is more frequently left out than in English. If the agent is included, it is with the auxiliary *av* 'by', which takes a dative form. We illustrate this with some examples (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 69):

- (34) (a) Hann kysti hana
 he.3SG.NOM kiss.SG.PST her.3SGACC
 'He kissed her'

- (b) Hon varð/bleiv kyst (av
 she.3SG.NOM be.SG.PST.AUX kiss.NOM.SG.F.PST.PTCP (by
 honum)
 him.DAT)
 'She was kissed by him'
- (35) (a) Hon kysti teir
 she.3SGNOM kiss.SG.PST.IND them.ACC.PL.M
 'She kissed them'
- (b) Teir vórðu/blivu kystir (av henni)
 they.3PL.NOM.M be.PL.PST.AUX kiss.NOM.PL.M (by her.DAT)
 'They were kissed by her'
- (36) (a) Teir smurdu hann av
 they smear he.3SG.ACC off
 'They beat him up'
- (b) Hann varð/bleiv avsmurdur
 he.3SG.NOM be offsmear.NOM.SG.M.PST.PTCP
 'He was beaten up'

In Faroese it is frequently possible to form so-called *-st*-forms, or *middle* forms, by adding the suffix *-st* to various inflectional forms of the verb. The meaning of the middle forms varies widely in Faroese, but the usages most frequently mentioned in discussions of the middle forms are reflexive, reciprocal, or passive. We give some examples below:

- (37) (a) Eg settist niður
 I sit down
 'I sat down' (reflexive meaning)
- (b) Teir berjast altíð
 they fight always
 'They always fight' (reciprocal meaning)
- (c) Oyggjin kallast Nólsoy
 island-DET call Nólsoy
 'The island is called Nólsoy' (passive meaning)

Perfect tense is either formed with the auxiliary *hava* 'have' and the supine (SGN of PSTPTCP) of the main verb, or it is formed with the auxiliary *vera* 'be' and the inflected and agreeing past participle. *Hava* is used with all transitive verbs and most intransitive verbs (Thránsson et al. 2012: 72):

- (38) (a) Hon hevur lisið bókina.
 she have.3SG.PST read.SUP book-DET.ACC
 'She has read the book'

- (b) Teir hava sovið leingi.
they have.3PL.PST sleep.SUP long
'They have slept for long'
- (c) Hann hevur verið ríkur.
he have.3SG.PST be.SUP rich
'He has been rich'
- (d) Hann er vorðin ríkur.
he.NOM.SG.M is become.NOM.SG.M rich
'He has become rich'

Past perfect is formed with past tense of the relevant auxiliary (*vera/havaas* mentioned above), and the perfect passive is formed with the auxiliary *vera* 'be', not *hava* 'have'. We illustrate this with a couple of examples:

- (39) (a) Hann hevði verið ríkur.
he have.PST be.SUP rich.NOM.M
'He had been rich'
- (b) Hann var vorðin ríkur.
he be.3SG.PST become.PST.PTCP rich.NOM.M
'He had become rich'
- (40) Hann er/*hevur ofta vorðin/blivin avsmurdur.
he be.3SG.PRS/*have often become.PST.PTCP off-smear.NOM.M
'He has often been beaten up'

The indicative-subjunctive distinction is not productive in Faroese and past subjunctive forms generally do not exist. Past subjunctive was commonly used in Old Norse (and still is in Modern Icelandic) to indicate a counterfactual or hypothetical situation. The regular past tense can have this function in Faroese, but the meaning of such forms are typically ambiguous. We illustrate this with a few examples:

- (41) (a) Eg gjørdi tað fegin.
I do.PST it gladly
'I did it gladly.' or 'I would gladly do it.'
- (b) Hann hevði dripið hundin.
he have.PST kill.PST.PTCP dog-DET.ACC.M
'He had killed the dog.' or 'He would have killed the dog.'
- (c) Hann tók bókina.
he take.PST book-DET.NOM.F
'He took the book.' or 'He would gladly take the book if...'
- (d) Eg hevði fegin gjørt tað, um eg fekk pengar fyri
I have.PST gladly do.PST.PTCP it if I get.PST money for
tað.
it

'I would gladly have done it if I was paid for it.'

- (e) Hann drap hundin, um hann fekk hendur á
he kill.PST dog-DET if he get.PST hand.NOM.PL. on
honum.
it

'He would kill the dog if he got his hands on it.'

- (f) Hann hevði tikið bókina frá mær, um
he have.PST take.PST.PTCP book-DET.NOM from me if
hann hevði sæð meg lisið í henni.
he have.PST see.PST.PTCP me read.PST.PTCP in it

'He would have taken the book from me if he had seen me reading it.'

3.3. Syntax

The default word order in Faroese is subject-verb-object (SVO) or subject-auxiliary-main verb-object (SAVO), both in main clauses and embedded ones. We look at some examples (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 236):

- (42) (a) Jógvan las bókina.
Jógvan read.PST book-DET.ACC.SG.F
'Jógvan read the book.'
- (b) Jógvan hevur lisið bókina.
Jógvan have.PST read.PST.PTCP book-DET.ACC.SG.F
'Jógvan has read the book.'
- (c) Eg haldi, at Jógvan hevur lisið bókina.
I think.PRS that Jógvan have.PST read.PST.PTCP book-DET
'I think that Jógvan has read the book.'

As a rule, the indirect object precedes the direct object and typically appears in the dative, although indirect objects in the accusative form also appear. Lets look at some examples:

- (43) (a) Turið gav Hjalmar nógvar bókur.
Turið.NOM give.PST Hjalmar.DAT many book.NOM.PL
'Turið gave Hjalmar many books.'
- (b) Eg spurdi, um Zakaris seldi Eivindi tann gamla
I ask if Zakaris.NOM sell.PST Eivind.DAT the old
bilin.
car-DET.ACC
'I asked if Zakaris sold the old car to Eivind.'
- (c) Hon lærði meg niðurlagið.
she teach.PST me.ACC refrain-DET.ACC

'She taught me the refrain.'

Should we move an object or a prepositional phrase, or some other non-subject, to the front of a sentence, as is done in Topicalisation, the finite verb shows up in second place followed by the subject, i.e. Faroese is a "verb-second" (V2) language like the other Germanic languages except English. We take a look at some examples (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 238-239):

- (44) (a) *Hesa bókina* hefur Jógván lisið.
 this book-DET.ACC have.PST Jógván.NOM read.PST.PTCP
 'This book has Jógván read.'
- (b) *Tann gamla bilin* seldi Zakaris Eivindi.
 the old car-DET.ACC sell.3.SG.PST Zakaris.NOM Eivind.DAT.
 'The old car Zakaris sold to Eivind.'
- (c) *Jóannes* haldi eg eigur hesa bókina.
 Jóannes.NOM think I own.3SG.PRS this book-DET.ACC
 'Jóannes, I think, owns this book.'

As is typical for modern Germanic languages, adjectives precede the noun they modify:

- (45) (a) *ein vøkur* genta, *ein bláur* bilur
 a beautiful.NOM.F girl.NOM.F, a blue.NOM.M car.NOM.M
 'a beautiful girl', 'a blue car'
- (b) Hann kom súkklandi á einari *gamlari* súkklu.
 he come.PST ride.PRS.PTCP on an old.DAT.F bicycle.DAT.F
 'He came riding on an old bicycle.'

When it comes to adverbs we can broadly distinguish between three basic adverbial positions (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 241):

1. the medial position, following the finite verb
2. the verb phrase position, following a possible object and other elements of the verb phrase
3. the modifying position, when the adverb is modifying and adjective and other adverbs

We illustrate this with a few examples:

- (46) (a) Tey hava *ikki/ivaleyst/jú/aldri* lisið
 they have not/undoubtedly/actually/never.ADV read
bókina.
 book-DET.ACC
 'They have not/undoubtedly/actually/never read the book.'

- (b) Tey hava lisið bókina
 they have read book-DET.ACC
tá/har/væl og virðiliga.
 then/there/well and thoroughly.ADV
 'They have read the book then/there/well and thoroughly.'
- (c) Tey hava lisið hesa ógvuliga longu bókina
 they have read this extremely.ADV long book-DET.ACC
sera væl.
 very.ADV well
 'They have read this extremely long book very well.'

Let's end by looking at the case of subject, object, and indirect object. The regular *subject* case in Faroese is *nominative*, as we already have seen in previous examples:

- (47) (a) *Hann* skrivur.
 he.NOM.SG write.3SG
 'He writes.'
- (b) *Hon* arbeiðir.
 she.NOM.SG work.3SG
 'She works.'
- (c) *Børnini* spæla.
 child-DET.NOM.PL play.3PL
 'The children play'
- (d) *Vit* settu niður epli í gjár.
 we.NOM.PL put down potato.PL yesterday
 'We planted potatoes yesterday.'

Before we continue, it should be mentioned that some verbs take non-nominative subjects in modern Faroese, but we won't look further into that here.

Looking at *direct object* case we can say that the *accusative* is the default case, as we have already seen in previous examples:

- (48) (a) *Hon* keypti bókina.
 she buy.PST book-DET.ACC
 'She bought the book.'
- (b) *Hann* seldi telduna.
 he sell.PST computer-DET.ACC
 'He sold the computer.'

It should be mentioned, however, that a number of verbs take a direct object in dative case, which we also touched upon earlier, but we will restrict ourselves here to saying that among the verbs that take a direct object in the dative are verbs

of helping, ordering, praising, thanking, welcoming, etc., leading one to associate the dative objects with thematic roles such as recipients and experiencers. The semantic verb classes and thematic roles we have mentioned are roughly the same as the ones taking a dative object in Icelandic, although dative objects are getting more rare in modern Faroese while still being prevalent in Icelandic (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 257-258).

At last we have the *indirect object*, which takes the *dative* as its default case, as we have seen in previous examples. Among the verbs taking an indirect object are verbs meaning 'sell', 'lend', 'give', 'send', etc. Let's look at three examples:

- (49) (a) Hann beyð henni starv.
he offer.PST she.DAT job.ACC
'He offered her a job.'
- (b) Tey finga sær bil.
they get.PST themselves.DAT car.ACC
'They got themselves a car.'
- (c) Fyrigiv honum syndir hansara.
forgive.IMP him.DAT sin.PL.ACC he.GEN
'Forgive him his sins.'

We notice from the examples that these verbs, *bjóða* 'offer', *fáa* 'get', *fyrigiva* 'forgive', are examples of verbs that take two objects, one dative (indirect) object and one accusative (direct) object. We call these verbs *ditransitive*. This dative–accusative pattern is also the most common case marking pattern of ditransitive verbs in Icelandic, but there we also have many other patterns, such as dative–dative, dative–genitive, accusative–dative, accusative–genitive, and accusative–accusative, most of which are not found in Faroese (Thráinsson et al. 2012: 262-263).

4. CONCLUSION

In the preceding sections we have gone through the morphology and syntax of Icelandic and Faroese, respectively. We have seen that it is possible to compare the complexity of two languages by looking at the structure of equivalent phenomena.

We have seen that inflection of nouns is similar in both languages; both have four cases (NOM, ACC, DAT, GEN, although genitive is largely not productive in Faroese) and three grammatical genders (M,F,N). On the other hand, verb inflections are more complex in Icelandic than Faroese. Firstly, the distinction between subjunctive and indicative has been lost in Faroese (except for a few fixed expressions), secondly the distinction between first, second, and third person in the plural has also been lost in Faroese, as has the person distinction in the past tense singular of weak verbs. Despite this, an innovation in faroese is the occurrence of the plural imperative, which did not exist on Old Norse, and doesn't in Modern Icelandic either, where the 2PL indicative has this role.

4.1. Future work

In the future this comparison could be built out to emphasise syntax more and put the analysis into the context of Role and Reference Grammar (RRG), which would nicely lay the groundwork for building of machine parsers for Icelandic and Faroese, respectively. We showed a sample of RRG trees for Icelandic, but this should be done for Faroese as well.

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*Author's address: Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, Blanchardstown Road
North, Dublin 15, Ireland
B00108126@student.itb.ie*