Chapter 4, Problem 7: Case Marking in Icelandic

The lexical analysis of case given in Problem 6 allows for the possibility that individual lexical items will select subjects or complements with idiosyncratic values for CASE. The case system of English is quite impoverished and doesn't exhibit any such lexical idiosyncrasies. But the closely related language Icelandic has just the sort of examples our analysis allows for. Certain verbs in Icelandic select subjects that are specified for cases other than nominative (which is the normal CASE value for subjects).

To accommodate this in our theory, all we need are lexical entries like the following:

$$
\left\langle \text{kyssti} \ , \begin{bmatrix} word \\ \text{HEAD} \quad verb \\ \text{VAL} \quad \begin{bmatrix} \text{SPR} \quad \langle \ \text{NP[nom]} \ \rangle \\ \text{COMPS} \quad \langle \ \text{NP[acc]} \ \rangle \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \right\rangle
$$

$$
\left\langle \text{vantar} \ , \begin{bmatrix} word \\ \text{HEAD} \quad verb \\ \text{VAL} \quad \begin{bmatrix} \text{SPR} \quad \langle \ \text{NP[acc]} \ \rangle \\ \text{COMPS} \quad \langle \ \text{NP[acc]} \ \rangle \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \right\rangle
$$

$$
\left\langle \text{gætir} \ , \begin{bmatrix} word \\ \text{HEAD} \quad verb \\ \text{VAL} \quad \begin{bmatrix} \text{SPR} \quad \langle \ \text{NP[gen]} \ \rangle \\ \text{COMPS} \quad \langle \ \rangle \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \right\rangle
$$

$$
\left\langle \text{batnaði} \ , \begin{bmatrix} word \\ \text{HEAD} \quad verb \\ \text{VAL} \quad \begin{bmatrix} \text{SPR} \quad \langle \ \text{NP[dat]} \ \rangle \\ \text{COMPS} \quad \langle \ \text{NP[nom]} \ \rangle \end{bmatrix} \end{bmatrix} \right\rangle
$$

We make the further assumption that nouns are not unspecified for CASE, as they are in English, but rather bear different CASE specifications, depending on what form they have (e.g. *barninu* is [CASE dat]). They pass these CASE specifications up to the NPs that they head.

With these new verbal entries in place and the grammar rules we already have, the Icelandic facts now fall into place. The new restrictions on specifiers and complements restrict the possible combinations in the desired way.

The alternative of associating particular case values with particular phrase structure positions would require that Icelandic have four different rules of the general form

$$ \text{S} \ \rightarrow \ \text{NP} \ \ \text{VP} $$

with four different CASE values on the NP. It would likewise need multiple VP expansion rules, because Icelandic also allows idiosyncratic case marking for object NPs. Such redundancy in the grammar rules is avoided in the lexical analysis adopted here.