INVERSION IN EMBEDDED CLAUSES IN MODERN ICELANDIC

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Word order in Icelandic prose is quite free, especially in main clauses. Although the most usual, or unmarked, word order in declarative sentences is subject + finite verb + . . . , almost any sentence constituent can be found in sentence-initial position. I call this phenomenon—the fronting of stressed elements of the predicate to sentence-initial position—topicalization. Whatever the discourse function of topicalization may be, there is an obvious syntactic consequence: the finite verb must then be moved into second position through inversion with the subject noun phrase (NP), if any. I refer to this general feature of Icelandic word order as the verb-second constraint (V2).

In this article inverted word orders in Modern Icelandic prose are studied in order to test the generality of V2 as a principle of Icelandic word order. This study is limited to embedded clauses, where V2 applies most generally. The article is organized as follows. In section 1, I argue for a general principle of what counts as second position, particularly in questions and relative clauses. In section 2, I look at examples of inversion and argue for a distinction between two kinds of fronting processes, topicalization and another kind of movement referred to as stylistic fronting. I argue that stylistic fronting, unlike topicalization, applies only in clauses containing a subject gap, and that this kind of fronting can therefore be viewed as a generalization of V2 to clauses that would otherwise begin with the finite verb. In section 3, this subject-gap condition on stylistic fronting is shown to provide an argument for the existence of oblique subjects.

Finally, in section 4, various conditions on what can precede the finite verb are discussed, including conditions on the use of the dummy það, and on the occurrence of filled subject gaps.

1. DEFINING SECOND POSITION

Topicalization in main clauses in Icelandic is fairly common. One study of Icelandic word order, Kossuth (1978), reported that, on the average, 20% of declarative sentences in Modern Icelandic prose begin with an element other than the subject. Topicalization in embedded clauses is much less frequent. However, it is by no means true that only subjects can precede the finite verb in embedded clauses, as has often been asserted. 1 An example of topicalization in an embedded clause is given in (1); the topicalized object NP is in boldface type.

(1) *Sigga Olina munni vel eftir því, að Brynjólfs hafið hún*

Sigga Olina remembered well after it, that Brynjólfs (ACC) had she oft og mér gaman sinnum getið fengið. *often and many times been-able-to-get.*

'Sigga Olina remembered well that she had time and again been able to get Brynjólfs (as a husband).'

(Gestur Pálsson, "Tíhugalið," Ch. 5)

Note that the finite verb is in second position in the embedded clause, as indicated by the numbering. V2 applies equally to both main and embedded clauses in Icelandic. First position for the finite verb (V1) is typically reserved for main clauses, namely, for direct questions, imperatives, and the so-called narrative style characteristic of Icelandic. In embedded clauses, the finite verb comes first in conditional sentences without the conjunction ef. Ignoring such conditionals, let us explore the hypothesis that V2 holds without exception in embedded clauses in Icelandic.

Of course, in order to determine the position of the finite verb, we need to know where the embedded clause begins: what counts as first position? Consider the examples in (2).

(2) a. *það sögðu, að anna hafði ekið kókina.*

they said that grandma had not 1 read the-book.

(Haugen, 1976: 84)

b. *Ég vissi alétri, hvort hann kæmi eða eki.*

1 knew never whether he would-come or not

2

c. *það vissu, hvorn anna hafði hitt í bynum.*

they knew whom grandma had 1 met in town

I...
Inversion in Embedded Clauses

4. Malurinn, sem umma hafti hitt 1 barum, heitir Pétur.

the-man that grandma had met in town is-named Peter

As indicated by the numbering, the subject NP counts as first position. Conjunctions such as all 'that' and hvori 'whether' are ignored, that is, they are considered to be outside the embedded clause. The same principle usually applies to interrogative pronouns such as hvom 'who', as illustrated in (2c), and the relative particle sem, as illustrated in (4d). But suppose that the embedded clause does not have a subject NP overtly present, as will be the case whenever the subject NP has been questioned or relativized. The relative particle sem and the interrogative pronouns are traditionally counted as subjects just as in the finite verb comes next. Thus, in the word order study referred to above, Kossuth (1978:446) states that "the relative particles sem and er were counted as C (= conjunction), but if appropriate, also as S (= subject)." It is clear that what is intended by "if appropriate" are sentences in which the subject NP has been relativized, and hence there is no subject to count as filling first position. Similarly, in his discussion of the possible positions of the finite verb in Scandinavian languages, Haugen (1976:84) gives the example shown in (3a) with the indicated numbering.

(3a) a. deir vissu, hver genginn veni vori genginn, they knew who (NOM) was/was gone

"They knew who had gone." 2 1 2 3

b. Malurinn, sem furinn var 1 var furinn heim, heitir Pétur.

the-man that gone was/was gone home is-named Peter

"The man that had gone home is named Peter." 1 2 3 2 3

Haugen does not give an example of a comparative relative clause, but he would presumably count the position of the finite verb as indicated in (3b). Note that the finite verb is counted as being in third position if the past participle has been inverted.

It is precisely for these cases that I propose a change from the traditional treatment of word order; even in the case of subjectless sentences the finite verb should be counted as being in second position, as illustrated in (4):

(4a) a. deir vissu hver furinn var 1 var furinn heim.

"They knew who had gone home." 1 2 1 1 3

b. Malurinn sem furinn var 1 var furinn heim heitir Pétur.

"The man who had gone home is named Peter." 1 2 3

c. Malurinn sem kom í gøi heitir Pétur.

"The man who came yesterday is-named Peter." 1 2 3

2. FRONTING IN EMBEDDED CLAUSES

In addition to the topicalization of stressed elements of the predicate, there is another type of fronting that is extremely common in embedded clauses and that is characteristic of Icelandic (and Faroese) as opposed to the other Scandinavian languages. This kind of fronting, which I refer to as stylistic fronting, is illustrated by the examples in (5) – (7). These examples were taken at random from two short stories by Gestur Pállsson (1970), "Tlíhugalt" and "Hans Vognjúr" but all are typical of the inverted word orders one finds in Icelandic prose. The examples have been divided into three categories, according to whether the embedded clause begins with (1) a past participle, (2) an adjective, or (3) some adverbial. Especially typical of the third category are negative adverbs such as ekki 'not' and verbal particles such as fram 'forward'. The fronted constituent is in boldface type.

(5a) Honum mætti standa á sama, hvíl sagt sem um hann, him (DAT) might stand on same what said was about him

"It might be all the same to him what was said about him." (**Tlíhugalt," Ch. 5)

b. og hann léti hú viti, at hann . . . eyni ekki heim, and he would let them know that he . . . would come not home, eyni og ráðgert hafti veris as planned had been

"and he would let them know that he wouldn't be coming home as had been planned." (**Tlíhugalt," Ch. 1)
2.1. Topicalization versus Stylistic Fronting

A preliminary dichotomy between topicalization and stylistic fronting is given in (8) below. The distinction between the two fronting processes is sometimes a fuzzy one, particularly when it comes to the fronting of adverbials (see section 4.2), and needs to be investigated further. Note the postverbal position of ekkó in (2a), however, which illustrates that adverbs do not generally precede the finite verb in embedded clauses in Icelandic, as opposed to the other Scandinavian languages.

(8) Topicalization

Appplies to object NPs, PPs, etc.

- Emphasis or focus on fronted constituent
- Uncommon in embedded Ss
- Judgment vary on fronting in relatives, questions, etc.
- Unbounded

Stylistic Fronting

Appplies to past participles, adjectives, some adverbs, particles, etc.

- Emphasis or focus on fronted constituent not necessarily present
- Common in embedded Ss
- Accepted by all speakers
- Clause bounded
- Subject gap not required

Subject gap required

The most obvious difference between the two fronting processes lies in the frequency of occurrence. As noted above, topicalization in embedded clauses is quite unusual. The sentence given in (1) was the only example I found in approximately seventy-five pages of text, whereas the examples in (5)–(7) are but a small sample of the stylistic fronting extent within the same corpus. Furthermore, the fronting of object NPs within questions and relative clauses is unacceptable for many speakers, whereas stylistic fronting is accepted by all speakers in the same environments (see section 5.1). Only topicalization can move a constituent outside of the clause in which it originates. Finally, there is a condition on the application of stylistic fronting that topicalization does not share; this condition is stated in (9).

(9) Stylistic fronting in an embedded clause is possible only if there is a subject gap in that clause.

Note the presence of the subject hún in the example of topicalization given in (1). In contrast, the examples in (5)–(7) all contain embedded clauses that are in
2.2. Evidence for the Subject-Gap Condition

Subject gaps can be created in one of three ways in Icelandic: (1) through extraction of the subject NP by unbounded transformational rules such as relativization, question formation, comparative clause formation, topicalization, and clefting; (2) through use of impersonal passives or lexically impersonal predicates; and (3) through indefinite NP postposing. The latter two cases of subject gaps can easily be recognized by the obligatory occurrence of pað in initial position if the sentence is used as a main-clause declarative. Let me emphasize here that my use of the term subject gap for these impersonal constructions is not meant to attribute subject status to the dummy pað.

In this section, data are given in support of the subject-gap condition on stylistic fronting stated in (9). The three types of subject gaps are considered in turn.

2.2.1. Subject Extractions

Many of the examples of stylistic fronting in (5)–(7) are instances of subject extraction. Three examples are repeated here for the reader's convenience, together with the normal, uninvected word order. In the (i) versions of the sentences, stylistic fronting has served to fill the subject gap of the (b) versions, indicated by a dash, which would otherwise remain empty.

(10) a. *Honum mætti staða á sama, hvað sagt veri um huan. (=5a)
   b. Honum mætti staða á sama, hvað — veri sagt um huan.

(11) a. *Hún bent á ýnsa roskna trésmiði í honum, sem byrjað höfla með engum eftum. (=5c)
   b. Hún bent á ýnsa roskna trésmiði í honum, sem — höfla byrjað með engum eftum.

(12) a. Svein for að muna fjör illa, sem fram hafti farði. (cf. 7c)
   b. Svein for að muna fjör illa, sem — hafti farði fram.

However, if the subject NP had not been extracted from the embedded clause, that is, if some other NP had been questioned or relativized, then stylistic fronting would be unacceptable. This is illustrated by the examples in (13)–(15), which all have definite subjects.
The ungrammatical (b) versions all have definite subjects, whereas the grammatical (a) versions are subjectless impersonal passives.

The same point can be made for predicative adjectives such as herra ‘possible’ or venjuleg ‘usual’, which can occur with dummy subject það but which often invert with the copula, instead. This type of fronting in embedded clauses was illustrated in (6). In general, these copular predicates are lexically impersonal and do not have corresponding personal uses. However, there is a personal construction with preposition til preceding an infinitive complement, which is illustrated in (19); this construction cannot take dummy það.

(19) a. Hann er illegur til að koma.
    he is likely (masc) to come
b. Hann er illegur til að koma.
    she is likely (fem) to come

With such personal copular predicates, stylistic fronting is possible only if the subject NP has been extracted; this is illustrated by the contrasts in (20).

(20) a. Hann er só eini sem ekki er illegur til að koma.
    he is the only that not is likely P to come
b. Hann spratl hvort ekki var það illegur til að koma.
    she asked whether not was he likely P to come
    ‘She asked whether he wasn’t likely to come.’
c. Hann spurt hvort illegur var þann til að koma.
    she asked whether likely was he to come

The ungrammatical sentences in (20b–c) have definite subjects in the embedded clause, whereas in the grammatical sentence (20a), the subject NP has been relativized.

2.2.3. Indefinite-NP Postposing

Icelandic has a rule of indefinite-NP postposing that is much more general than its English counterpart, there-insertion (Thrúansson, 1979, Ch. 7). The contrast in (21) shows that the rule is sensitive to the definiteness of the subject NP in main-clause declaratives, the resulting subject gap must be filled.

(21) a. *Það eru trúðumíhrir í bænum.
    there are the carpenters in town
b. Það eru nokkrir trúskið í bænum.
    there are some carpenters in town

This contrast is reflected in the acceptability of stylistic fronting in embedded clauses.

(22) a. *Hún bent á byggð þar sem þýggðu hófðu trúðumíhrir með
    she pointed to the town where that begun had the carpenters with
    engum efnum og oreið í heimsfræðigildi
    no material and become world-famous later
b. Hún bent á byggð, þar sem þýggðu hófðu nokkrir trúskið
    she pointed to the town where that begun had some carpenters
    með engum efnum og oreið í heimsfræðigildi
    with no material and become world-famous later

Additional examples of indefinite-NP postposing are given in (23) and (24).

(23) það eru margir þræfiglar í Islendingar fæddir í þessum bæ.
    there are many famous Icelanders born in this town
    ‘Many famous Icelanders were born in this town.’

(24) a. Þetta er hérren þar sem þýggðu þræfiglar í Islendingar eru fæddir.
    this is the town where many famous Icelanders are born
    ‘This is the town where many famous Icelanders were born.’

b. Þetta er hérren þar sem þýggðu eru þræfiglar með
    this is the town, where born are many most-famous men
    þjóðfarar.
    ‘This is the town where many of the most famous men of the nation
    were born.’

Indefinite-NP postposing creates a subject gap that makes stylistic fronting of the adjective fæddir (nom-masc-pl) in (24b) possible. Note that stylistic fronting is possible in (24b), even though for many speakers það-insertion is not possible, as illustrated by the ungrammaticality of (25).19

(25) *Þetta er hérren, þar sem það eru margir þræfiglar í Islendingar fæddir.
    this is the town where there are many famous Icelanders born
    The contrast between (24b) and (25) shows clearly that indefinite-NP postposing is independent of það-insertion in Icelandic. Other examples are given in (26)–(27).

(26) a. Það eru ekki til draugrar.
    there are not P ghosts

b. Það eru ekki til eru draugrar.
    that which not is P are ghosts
    ‘What doesn’t exist is ghosts.’

c. *Það eru ekki til eru draugrar.
    that which there is not P are ghosts

(27) a. Þetta er nokkrir sem ekki er hægt all gera við.
    this is something that not is possible to fix
    ‘This is something that can’t be fixed.’
Inversion in Embedded Clauses

b. *Petta er nokkuð sem þau er ekki hægt að gera við.

this is something that it is not possible to fix.
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Where þau-insertion is impossible in declarative sentences because indefinite-NP postposing cannot apply, I predict that stylistic fronting is impossible for the same reason, namely, there is no subject gap to be filled. This prediction is borne out, as illustrated in (28).


there wrote Helgi the-letter
b. *Eg held að ekki skráði Helgi brefði.

I think that not wrote Helgi the-letter
c. Pettur er brefði. sem ekki skráði Helgi.

this is the-letter that not wrote Helgi

d. *Pettur er brefði. sem skráði hefur Helgi þriðvar.

this is the-letter that written has Helgi thrice.

2.3. An Accessibility Hierarchy

Section 2.2 provided evidence for the hypothesis stated in (9) that stylistic fronting serves to fill subject gaps created by independently motivated rules of Icelandic syntax. We have seen that subject gaps can be filled by past participles, predicate adjectives, verbal particles, and adverbs such as ekki ‘not’. The obvious question is what happens if the embedded clause contains more than one of these elements. Stylistic fronting seems to be governed by the following accessibility hierarchy:

(29) ekki := predicate adjective > past participle

Consider the contrast illustrated in (30):

(30) a. Þeir voru all tilum hvað hægt hefði verið. (=6c)

they were to talk about what possible had been

They were talking about what had been possible.

b. *Þeir voru all tilum hvað verði hefði hege.

they were talking about what been had possible

Data in support of the hierarchy in (29) are given in examples (31)–(36).

(31) a. Þetta er glapaamadurinn sem ekki hefur verið það er dæmandur.

this is the-criminal that not has been convicted

b. *Það er dæmandur hefur ekki verið.

c. *Það er dæmandur ekki hefur verið.

(32) a. Það fór að rigna, þegar húð var að bórða.

it went to rain when finished was to eat

b. *Það var húð áðir að bórða.

c. *Það var ekki áðir að bórða.

82

3. Oblique Subjects

Icelandic has many verbs that appear to have oblique (i.e., non-nominative) subjects; the NP that precedes the finite verb in the stylistically unmarked word order is not in the nominative case. Some examples of such verbs are given in (37).

(37) a. Mið vantar skó.

me (ACC) lacks shoes (ACC)

'I lack shoes.'

b. Mér nýgju tvar bakar.

me (DAT) suffice two books (NOM)

'Two books is enough for me.'

c. Þeim nýgju tvar bakar.

them (DAT) suffices two books (NOM)

'Two books is enough for them.'

Thrúður Olafsdóttir (1979, Ch. 7) argues at length that these preverbal NPs should be analyzed as subjects rather than as preposed objects, despite their non-nominative

Inversion in Embedded Clauses

83

Joan Maling

only if that clause contains a subject gap. Conditions on the filling of subject gaps with dummy *had* are discussed. Section 4.2 notes some problems with respect to the application of topicalization in embedded clauses.

4.1. Constraints on Filling Subject Gaps

In section 2 it was suggested that the function of stylistic fronting is to fill various kinds of subject gaps in order to satisfy V2. In this section, we look more generally at the treatment of subject gaps in Modern Icelandic prose, and at apparent exceptions to V2. In particular, when is it possible for an embedded clause (other than a conditional clause) to begin with the finite verb?

Subject extraction by unbounded transformational rules such as relativization often creates embedded clauses in which the finite verb appears to be in first position; examples have been given in (4k) and (10b)–(12b). Impersonal constructions can also give rise to apparent instances of verb-first order. This is illustrated for impersonal passives by the example in (41).

(41) *Hann spedi hvar – venn jafn ekki vinstra megin.
he asked where was still driven left side
‘He asked where people still drove on the left side of the road.’

Verb-first order is not possible, however, if a subject NP is present, as shown by the contrast in (42):

(42) a. *Heta er handritið sem hann skrifði eftir.
this is the manuscript that he copied from
b. *Heta er handritið sem skrifði hann eftir.

Such contrasts suggest the following hypothesis:

(42) The finite verb will appear to be in first position in an embedded clause only if the clause contains a subject gap.

The subject-gap hypothesis stated above allows us to maintain the claim that V2 applies to embedded clauses without exception, but it forces us to rephrase the question of exceptions to V2 in the following way: how are subject gaps treated in Icelandic syntax?

The data presented in section 2 suggest that subject gaps can always be filled by stylistic fronting. But can they be filled in other ways, and when can they be left empty? It is well known that dummy *had* is often used to begin subjectless sentences. In main-clause declaratives, *had* occurs in sentence-initial position if and only if nothing has been frosted. The same is true of embedded declaratives, as shown by the contrast in (44):

(44) a. *Heg veit að það er ekki vinstra megin í Æstralú. I know that there is driven left side in Australia.
I know that people still drive on the left in Australia.
b. *Heg veit að ekkí vinstra megin í Æstralú.
Inversion in Embedded Clauses

It is clear that subject gaps in declaratives must be filled in order to satisfy V2, either by stylistic fronting or by ẹð-insertion, if nothing has been topicalised. (Let me emphasize again that I am not attributing subject status to either kind of filler.)

However, there are other clause types that do allow subject gaps to remain unfilled. This seems to be generally true of clauses that inherently contain gaps, for example, relatives, questions, and comparatives, although the gap that leads to apparent verb-first order need not be the result of subject extraction, as was illustrated in (41). An example for relative clauses is given in (45).

(45) Bretland er eina landîð har sem er ennþá ekði vinstra megin.
Britain is only country where is still driven left side
‘Britain is the only country where people still drive on the left.’

In such clauses, subject gaps due to impersonal constructions can be filled by stylistic fronting, but many speakers do not accept ẹð-insertion (cf. section 2.2.3), as illustrated in (46)–(47):

(46) a. Hann spáði hvar ekði varð ennþá vinstra megin.
he asked where driven was still left side
‘He asked where people still drove on the left.’

b. *Hann spáði hvar það varð ennþá ekði vinstra megin.

(47) a. Bretland er eina landîð har sem ekði er ennþá vinstra megin.
Britain is only country where driven is still left side
‘Britain is the only country where people still drive on the left.’

b. *Bretland er eina landîð har sem það er ennþá ekði vinstra megin.

Similarly, for comparative clauses:

(48) a. Hann rauðali þá visna sîna nokkuð herra en veðjulegi
he hummed then tune his somewhat louder than usual
was
‘Then he hummed his tune somewhat louder than was usual.’

b. Hann rauðali þá visna sîna nokkuð herra en var veðjulegi.

(49) a. Hver heldur lögreglan að það hafti framð lagðri?
who think the-police that has committed the-criminal
‘Who do the police think committed the crime?’

b. *Hver heldur lögreglan að það hafti framði lagðri?

4.2. Constraints on Topicalization

I conclude by mentioning briefly some tentative conditions on the application of topicalization in embedded clauses. In section 2 it was noted that topicalization is more restricted in embedded clauses than it is in main clauses, and that grammatical judgments often vary greatly from speaker to speaker. The situation is particularly complicated with respect to the fronting of adverbs. Not all adverbs are equally acceptable in initial position, nor are even different uses of the same adverb equally acceptable. Consider the subtle contrast illustrated in (50):

(50) a. ?Hann fann setningu sem vandlega hafði verði þegar.
he found a-picture that carefully had been hidden
‘He found a picture that had been hidden carefully.’

b. Hann fann mynd sem vandlega hafði verði þegar.
he found a-picture that carefully had been hidden
‘He found a picture that had been carefully hidden.’

c. Hann fann mynd sem vandlega hafði verði þegar.
he found a-picture that carefully had been tried to be-silent
‘He found a sentence that they had carefully tried not to mention.’

It is unclear whether it is sufficient to distinguish between manner and modal uses of adverbs.

These problems with adverbs serve to point out that the distinction between topicalization and stylistic fronting is sometimes a fuzzy one. In general, stylistic fronting is a more local process involving elements of the verbal complex, and often without the emphatic feel of topicalization. Fronting of verbal arguments, especially NPs, can cross clause boundaries and is considerably more restricted than stylistic fronting, especially in clauses such as relatives or embedded questions that already contain a gap. Extraction out of topicalized sentences generally produces sentences of very low acceptability, as noted for Icelandic by Ægen (1993) and Ólafsson (1979:472). The definiteness and heaviness of the fronted NP seems to affect acceptability, suggesting that only presupposed NPs may be fronted in embedded clauses. Consider the contrasts illustrated below:
Inversion in Embedded Clauses

(51) a. Detta er handurinn sem minkinn drop.
    'This is the dog that the-mink (ACC) killed
    this is the dog that the-mink (ACC) killed.

    b. *Detta er handurinn sem minkur drepur.
    'This is the dog that the-mink (ACC) killed.
    'This is the dog that the-mink (ACC) killed.

(52) a. Detta er maðurinn sem smáður skráði.
    'This is the man that the-short-story (ACC) wrote.
    'This is the man that wrote the short story.

    b. *Detta er maðurinn sem smáður skráði.
    'This is the man that the-short-story (ACC) wrote.
    'This is the man that wrote the short story.

(53) a. Hún benti á trésmóína sem hásgógin höfðu smíðað.
    she pointed to the carpenters that the-furniture had made
    'She pointed to the carpenters that the-furniture had made.

    b. *Hún benti á trésmóína sem hásgógin höfðu smíðað.
    furniture had made
    'She pointed to the carpenters that the-furniture had made.

    c. *Hún benti á trésmóína sem ur eik höfðu smíðað vánduð en öðyr
    of oak had made bad but cheap
    'She pointed to the carpenters that the-furniture had made

Verbals complements such as locatives can sometimes be fronted, as illustrated by the acceptability of (54), whereas predicate nominals cannot be fronted in relatives, as illustrated in (55) (although they can be fronted in a 'that'-clause).

(54) Hann fann stóll sem hér hafti stóð.
    he found a chair that there had stood
    'He found a chair that had stood there.

(55) *Erna er konan sem forseti Islands var komin.
    there is the-woman that elected was president Iceland
    'There is the-woman who was elected President of Iceland.

Whatever the conditions on topicalization may be, note that all of these embedded clauses freely allow stylistic fronting of a past participle when it occurs:

(56) a. Detta er handurinn sem dreppi hefur þann frezz.
    this is the-mink that has killed five minks.
    'This is the dog that has killed five minks.

    b. Detta er maðurinn sem skráði hefur margar smáður.
    'This is the man that has written many short-stories.

    c. Hún benti á trésmóína sem smáður höfðu vánduð en öðyr
    she pointed to the carpenter that made had bad but cheap
    'She pointed to the carpenter that made had bad but cheap furniture.

     furniture

These differences support the distinction drawn in section 2 between the two fronting processes, topicalization and stylistic fronting.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This article was written during the summer of 1980, and appeared later the same year in Islandsk mál og almenn málfræði 2, 175–193; it is reprinted here with two changes: the addition of English glosses for the Icelandic examples, and (except in the title) a change of terminology from the original "stylistic inversion" to the more appropriate "stylistic fronting." With hindsight, I feel that the statement made in the very first sentence—that Icelandic word order is "quite free"—is misleading; in fact, the apparent freedom in-á-vís English is almost entirely restricted to the choice of phrases that can occur in sentence-initial position. For references to the more recent literature on Icelandic word order, see Sigurðarson and Thráinsson (this volume: 3–46).

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NOTES

1 The term topicalization may be somewhat of a misnomer, but it has become standard usage in the transformational literature. It is unclear if the discourse function of topicalization is related to the topic–comment distinction; moreover, different languages may put the same syntactic construction to different uses. For some discussion of the discourse function of topicalization in Icelandic, see Thráinsson (1979:64–66).

2 For example, Haugen (1976:84).

3 See Maling and Záven (1978, and this volume: 383–407) for discussion of the consequences of this fact for the derived constituent structure of questions and topicalizations.

4 Although V2 is the general rule in embedded clauses, there are some examples of the finite verb in third position as the result of an adverb in second position, a possibility noted by Bergsveinnsson (1969) in his otherwise exhaustive study of adverb positions. Some examples are given in (1), with the adverbs in bold face type.
Inversion in Embedded Clauses

(i) a. eins og hann varð röður . . . at hann dag og dag varð lavinn.
   just as he became that he now and then became sick
   ("Hans Vogger")

b. Þegar ... lokins fann lagði
   when 1 finally found the tune

c. Þegar ... löknun hiti hann
   when 1 just met him

d. Þegar ... alli að einu dán í hag að
   when to me suddenly occurred that

Note that Icelandic is unlike the other Scandinavian languages in that the negative adverb eðurse does not occur in second position in embedded clauses; a sentence such as (ii) is felt to be a Danicism.

(ii) *Póði eða þegar ekki hafði fundið hann
   although I not had found him

Second position for adverbs seems to have the effect of emphasis, but not all adverbs or adverbial PPs can occur in this position. Note the contrasts in (iii):

(iii) Þegar eða
   when 1
   fyrir lónrga ’long ago’
   lokins ’finally’
   þum helgina ’on the weekend’
   þil fyrstu þinu ’for the first time’
   með Sigga ’with Sigga’
   hiti hann
   met him

Just what class(es) of adverbs can occur in second position remains to be determined. (For further discussion, see Nýjáruð and Þráinsson, this volume: 3–40.)

Koskull (1978) observes that an average of 6.5% (with a range of 1–14 percent) of embedded clauses begin with nonsubjects, as opposed to 20% of main clauses. Unfortunately, the two kinds of inversion are lumped together in her study, making it difficult to evaluate the significance of the different frequencies, which may or may not be entirely attributable to the markerness of topicalization in embedded clauses.

See, e.g., Baker (1978) for an introduction to the basic properties of topicalization and clefting. Some properties of these transformations in Icelandic are discussed in Þráinsson (1979). Indefinite-NP postposing is the Icelandic equivalent of there-insertion in English. For a discussion of subjectless constructions in Icelandic, see Þráinsson (1979, Ch. 7).

For a discussion of the role of dummy það in Icelandic syntax, see Andrews (this volume: 165–185), Malin and Zeren (this volume: 383–407), and Þráinsson (1979, ch. 7).

They have used only definite-subject NPs in these examples in order to rule out the possibility of indefinite-NP postposing, which also creates subject gaps, see section 3.2.3.

In transformational terms, Icelandic lacks a subject-to-subject raising construction with copular predicates. In English syntax, subject-to-subject raising relates pairs of sentences such as (i) and (ii):

(i) It is not likely that George will be elected.
(ii) George is not likely to be elected.

In (i) the copular predicate be likely takes a dummy subject is and a that-clause complement, whereas (ii) takes an ordinary NP subject and an infinitival complement. The subject of the that-clause complement in (i) corresponds to the subject of the copular predicate in (ii). See Thráinsson (1979: 409ff.).

I found considerable variation among speakers as to the acceptability of það in such contexts. Most speakers reject það in the starred examples of (25)–(27), but others find it quite acceptable, especially in þar som relatives and its spoken as opposed to written style. Use of það is undoubtedly on the increase.

These examples were brought to my attention by Helgi Þorleifsson; the excision in number agreement is noted by Bjorn Guðbrandsson (1958, 66, Abh. 1).

Note that this difference provides further support for the distinction between topocalization and stylistic fronting.

Yet another argument that preverbal oblique NPs are actually subjects rather than preposed objects comes from the variety of possible infinitival phrases. Consider the following:

(i) Að vona só
   *Að míg vonna see slamt.
   "To lack shoes"
   *Að vona mig só
   "To lack me"
   *Að vona mig só
   "To lack me shoes"

(ii) Að nágja þur barð
   *Að nágja þeim suffe two books
   "To suffice two books"
   *Að nágja þur barð
   "To suffice two books"
   *Að nágja þur barð
tafululyg.
   "To suffice them two books"
   *Að nágja þur barð
tafululyg.
   "is horrible".

Assuming that infinitival phrases are simply subjectless clauses, then, regardless of whether they are base generated as such (e.g., as VPs) and their subjects supplied interpretively, or whether they are generated as full sentences with subjects that are transformationally deleted, the contrasts illustrated in (i)–(ii) support the analysis of preverbal oblique NPs as subjects. Infinitival phrases containing an inverted subject NP, while at the same time missing a topicalized object NP, are not even "reasonably plausible," as noted by Thráinsson (1979: 409) for infinitives produced by EQU. He makes a similar argument for the subjecthood of these preverbal oblique NPs.

But see n. 4.

This generalization is Annie Zeren's. See Zeren (1980) for a more detailed discussion of the environments in which apparent verb-first orders are possible. (for a different point of view, see Sigurðsson, this volume: 41–69.)

This contrast was brought to my attention by Kristján Arnason.

These observations are Kristján Arnason's.

REFERENCES


