The ‘new impersonal’ construction in Icelandic

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Abstract. This paper reports the results of an extensive study of a syntactic change currently underway in Iceland. The new construction appears to contain a morphological passive auxiliary and participle which is able to assign accusative case to a postverbal argument. The study was designed to track the development of this ongoing change and to test the hypothesis that the innovative construction in fact involves the reanalysis of passive morphology as a syntactically active construction with a phonologically null impersonal subject. This syntactic change seems to parallel the completed development of the ‘moto construction in Polish and the autonomous form in Eth.

1. Introduction

In this paper we report the results of an extensive study of an innovative syntactic construction that is developing in the language of young Icelandic speakers. Because this construction is based on passive morphology and appears to have the same discourse function as the traditional passive, it has been dubbed the ‘new passive’ (Kjaranons 1991). We argue that despite the passive morphology, the construction is in fact syntactically active and thus will rename it the ‘new impersonal.’

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We begin by describing the morphological properties of both the standard passive and the innovative construction. The traditional passive in Icelandic can be categorized into the three types illustrated in (1). The Icelandic passive exhibits the well-known distinction between structural and lexical case. The accusative object of an active voice verb becomes nominative in the passive voice, as illustrated in (1a); lexically-assigned inherent case is preserved under NP-movement, as illustrated in (1b). In either case, NP-movement to subject position is obligatory. Given that Icelandic is a V2 language, the subjunctives of these NPs is not obvious from the word order; for detailed argumentation, see Zaden, Maling and Thraínsen (1985), Sigurðsson (1980/1992). As illustrated in (1c), an agentic intransitive verb may also form a morphological passive; this is the so-called 'impersonal passive.' The expletive það 'it' is used as needed to satisfy the Verb-Second Constraint.

(1) The Canonical Passive

a. Stóðan var lainin i kleðan. The girl was badly beaten.  
   The girl-NOM was hit-f.sg.NOM in a mess  
   Nominative Passive

b. i. Henni var hirti, i stólanum. She was pushed at school.  
   the.DAT was pushed-neut.sg in the school  
   Oblique Passive

ii. Kennum var saknað.  
   the.teacher-GEN was missed-neut.sg  
   People danced around the Christmas tree.  
   Impersonal Passive

c. Það var dansað í kringum jólaskap. People danced around the Christmas tree.  
   Það was danced-neut.sg around the Christmas tree.  
   Impersonal Passive

The innovative construction takes the form in (2); the examples correspond to the sentences in (1). The sentences in (2) are sharply nonstandard in the standard language, as shown by the results of our study, where over 70% of the youngsters (n = 1695) judged sentence (2a) to be acceptable, as compared to only 4% of the adults (n = 200).

(2) The Innovative Construction

a. Það var lainið stókum í kleðan. The girl was badly beaten.  
   Það was hit-neut.sg, the girl-f.sg.ACC in a mess  
   'New Passive/Impersonal'
b. Padd var hriði benni í skólanum.
  iresp was pushed her-DAT in the school
She was pushed at school.

c. Padd var sakað kennaran.
  irep was missed the.teacher-GEN
The teacher was missed.

In the standard passive, if the verb governs Accusative case on its object in the active voice, that argument will bear Nominative case in the passive, and agreement of the finite verb and passive participle is obligatory, as illustrated in (3a); this is true whether the argument appears preverbally in subject position or whether it occupies some postverbal position (as in (3a)). In the innovative construction, however, that argument remains in situ in object position and continues to be marked Accusative, as illustrated in (2a). If the verb assigns a lexical/inherent case, either Dative or Genitive, that case is preserved in the new passive, as shown in (2b, c). This is not surprising since oblique case is preserved under NP-movement in the standard language as well, as illustrated in (1b). However, as illustrated in (2), the underlying object remains in object position even if it is definite. This is significant since in general, postposed subjects in Icelandic must be indefinite in both passive and active voice sentences, as illustrated by the contrasts in (3) and (4).

(3) The Definiteness Effect on postverbal (VP-internal) subjects

a. Padd voru seldir margir bilar  
  irep were sold-m.pl. many cars-m.pl.NOM yesterday
Many cars were sold yesterday.  Passive voice

b. *Padd voru seldir bilarnir  
  irep were sold-m.pl. the cars-m.pl.NOM yesterday
Intended: ‘There were the cars sold yesterday.’

(4) a. Padd bafa loikið flut stríkar inn í húsin  
  irep have finally moved boys-NOM into in the building
Some boys have finally moved into the building.  Active voice

b. *Padd bafa loikið flut stríkarinnu inn í húsin  
  irep have finally moved the.boys-NOM into in the building
Thus, if the postverbal NP in sentences like those in (2) is in fact the grammatical subject of a passive, then the innovative construction systematically violates the Definiteness Effect (see Saffir 1985; Sigurðsson 1989/1992).

To summarize, there are three syntactic innovations of note in the new construction as compared to the standard passive. These are listed in (5):

(5) Three syntactic innovations in the 'new passive' as compared to the standard passive:
   a. Accusative rather than nominative case on the underlying object
   b. Lack of NP-movement to object position
   c. Lack of any Definiteness effect

The innovative construction cannot be interpreted as simply a change in the syntactic behavior of lexically case-marked NPs since the change affects structurally case-marked objects as well. Nor is the lack of the Definiteness Effect a general feature of the grammar of speakers who use the 'new impersonal', as some linguists have speculated (Guðmundsdóttir 2000, p. 171, fn. 77). Our data show that this speculation is incorrect (see section 5.1 below). One of the ungrammatical control sentences on our questionnaire contained an active voice verb with a definite nominative NP in object position. The acceptance rate for this sentence was under 3% even though such sentences would be perfectly grammatical if the postverbal nominative NP were indefinite, as illustrated in (3a) and (4a).

2. Theoretical discussion. Two hypotheses

How should this innovative construction be analyzed? Is the new construction a passive with postposed subject and expletive þat despite the fact that it violates the Definiteness Effect? Or is it really a syntactically active construction despite the fact that it is built with auxiliary vera 'to be' and the past participle of the main verb just like the canonical passive? The underlying representations under these two hypotheses are sketched in (6a, b), respectively:

(6) Two Hypotheses
   a. [ív e í Tns;Agr;Pass] [V; V NP]] Canonical Passive
      with NP-movement
   b. [ív; pres [í Tns;Agr] [v; V NP]] Active Impersonal
The first hypothesis is that it is a variant of the canonical passive, with an empty category e in subject position but without NP-movement. The second hypothesis is that this is a syntactically active impersonal construction with a phonologically null pro [human] subject. The crucial difference between the two analyses is whether or not a theta role is assigned to subject position. If the innovative construction is simply a variant of the canonical passive, then no theta role is assigned to subject position; the innovative construction would then differ only in that the normally obligatory NP-movement fails to apply, and the underlying object somehow receives accusative case in situ. If, on the other hand, it is a syntactically active impersonal construction, then the subject position is filled with a phonologically null pro which is assigned both the subject theta role and nominative case. Under either analysis, expletive pað will be inserted at S-structure as needed to satisfy the Verb-Second Constraint; this phonetic pað is nonreferential and does not bear a theta role.

Slobin (1985) proposes an analysis of the first type for the Ukrainian -mo/lo construction; Malin (1993) argues that an analysis of the second type is correct for the Polish counterpart as well as for the Irish autonomous construction (see also Lavine 2000; Blevins 2001). We propose that the second type of analysis is the best one for the innovative Icelandic construction. Both in this paper, and in Malin and Sigríðsdóttir (1997), which reported the results of a small pilot study, our hypothesis is that the Icelandic 'new passive' represents the first stages of the reanalysis of the canonical passive morpheme from passive to syntactically active. As sketched in (6b), our working hypothesis is that the null pro in this construction is an external argument which gets interpreted as an 'unspecified human subject' (in the terminology of Relational Grammar). We will, therefore, refer to the innovative construction as the 'new impersonal' rather than the 'new passive.' Under the analysis sketched in (6b), the pro subject is assigned both a theta role and nominative case. In effect, the examples of the 'new impersonal' illustrated in (2) are normal transitive clauses. The appearance of accusative case on the postverbal object in (2a) is therefore entirely expected, as is the observed lack of the Definiteness Effect (cf. Sigurðsson 1989, ch. 6), which applies only to subjects.

It is worth noting that a similar syntactic development has occurred independently in a number of languages. As discussed in Malin (1993), the Irish autonomous form and the Polish -mo/lo construction each developed from a canonical morphological passive. In both these languages, the innovative construction has the syntactic properties listed in (7) in addition to the overt morphological properties of accusative case-marking and non-

(7) Syntactic Properties of Impersonal Constructions with thematic subject
   a. No agentive by-phrase is possible.
   b. Binding of anaphors (reflexive and reciprocal) is possible.
   c. Control of subject-oriented adjuncts is possible.
   d. Nonagentive ("unaccusative") verbs can occur in the construc-

On the other hand, the accusative-case assigning -męta construction in Ukrainian has none of the syntactic properties listed in (7). It is clear, therefore, that no conclusion about the syntactic analysis can be based solely on the overt morphological fact that accusative case is assigned to the underlying object. Rather it is necessary to investigate the syntactic behavior of the construction in some detail.

As cross-linguistic background to our study of the innovative Icelandic construction, we first compare and contrast the syntactic properties of the cognate Polish and Ukrainian -męta constructions illustrated below. 1

In (8) through (10), we illustrate for Polish the syntactic properties listed in (7). The canonical passive illustrated in (8a) coexists with the participle -męta construction illustrated in (8b).

(8) Two so-called passive constructions in Polish
   a. Świątynia była zbudowana w 1640 roku.
      church-NOM was built-IMP in 1640 year
      Canonical passive
   b. Świątynie zbudowano w 1640 roku.
      church-ACC built-IMP in 1640 year
      Impersonal "passive"

The syntactic behavior of the canonical passive in (8a) contrasts sharply with that of the participle -męta construction in (8b). As shown in (9), the canonical passive has all the expected syntactic properties of a true passive. As shown in (9a), an agentive by-phrases can occur; as shown in (9b), bound anaphors are not allowed; as shown in (9c), the non-thematic

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1 The forms -na and -u in Polish and Ukrainian are allomorphs of the past passive morpheme -n, once the verbal suffix is now invariable. See Lavine (2000, ch. 3) for discussion of the morphological status of this ending.

subject cannot serve as a controller for various subject-oriented adjuncts, nor can the underlying agent serve as the controller. Polish is like English in that even agentive intransitive verbs do not form impersonal passives; this is illustrated by the example in (9d) from Lawie (2000, ch. 3); however, if Polish did have impersonal passives of intransitives, we would not expect unaccusative verbs to form true passives.

(9) **Properties of the canonical passive in Polish**

a. Jan był obrabowywany przez nich.  
*John-NOM was robbed-3mgs by them*

Agentive by-phrase

b. *Swoja własna ojczyzna była chwalona.*  
*REFL own fatherland-NOM was praised*  

Bound anaphors

c. Jan był obrabowywany po pijacemu.  
*John-NOM was robbed-3mgs while drunk*

John was robbed while drunk. [John was drunk]

Subject Control

d. i. *Waszelię było tańczone.*  
*everywhere was-neut.sg danced-neut.sg*

Intended: There was dancing everywhere.

ii. *Dawniej było uermiane mbodo.*  
*before was-neut.sg died-neut.sg young*

Intended: In the old days, people died young.

Unaccusative

As illustrated in (10), the -no in construction differs in each of these four syntactic properties, exactly as expected if it has a fully thematic subject. For these reasons, we have glossed the -no suffix in Polish as IMP (for impersonal). As shown in (10a), no agentive by-phrase is allowed. As shown in (10b), the thematic external argument can bind anaphors in non-subject positions. As shown in (10c), the null thematic subject can serve as a syntactic controller for the same adjuncts which are disallowed in the canonical passive. And, finally, as illustrated in (10d), intransitive verbs

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1 Lawie (2000, p. 128f) provides further grammatical contrasts between canonical verbal passives and the -no construction in Polish based on psych-pronouns.
can occur in this construction, not only agentives but also unaccusatives.
Note that the contrast between (9biii) and (10biii) would be unexplained if
both constructions were analyzed as passives.

(10) **Properties of the -nato passive in Polish**

a. Jana obrabowano (*przez nich*) Agentive by phrase
    John-ACC robbed-IMP (*by them*)
    They robbed John (*by them*).

b. i. Zamknęto se w fabryce. Bound anaphors
    locked-IMP REFPL in factory
    They locked themselves in the factory.

   ii. Chwalono swój własny ojczyznę.
    praised-IMP REFPL own fatherland-fsgACC
    They praised their own fatherland.

c. Jana obrabowano po pijanemu. Subject control
    John-ACC robbed-IMP while drunk
    They robbed John while (they were) drunk.

d. i. Tańczono wszędzie. Unergative intransitive
    danced-IMP everywhere
    There was dancing everywhere.

   ii. Dawniej umierano mimo. Unaccusative intransitive
    before died-IMP young
    In the old days, people died at a young age.

The -nato morphology, originally a passive participle, can now attach to
unaccusative verbs, including the copula and raising verbs, as shown in

(11) **-nato with unaccusative verbs in Polish**

a. Zkawano się nas nie zauważać
    seen-IMP REFPL us not notice-INF
    They seemed not to be noticing us.

b. Przed wojną bywano w Grand Hotelu.
    before war be-IMP in Grand Hotel
    Before the war, people frequented the Grand Hotel.
The only lexical restriction is a semantic one: the understood subject must be [+human]. Thus unlike the canonical passive, the -natо construction does not observe the 1-Advancement Exclusiveness Law (IAEX) of Relational Grammar (Perlmutter and Postal 1984), which rules out passives of unaccusative predicates. To summarize, despite its historical origin as a morphological passive, the innovative -natо construction in Polish now behaves syntactically like French on-sentences except that the impersonal pronoun subject is null.

Now observe that the Ukrainian counterpart discussed by Sobin (1985) differs from the Polish construction with respect to all these syntactic properties (cf. Billings and Maling 1993; Lavine 2000, 2001); hence, we gloss the cognate -natо suffix in Ukrainian as PASS. The agentive by-phrase is realized in Ukrainian as a bare NP in the Instrumental case.

(12) Syntactic properties of the Ukrainian -natо construction

a. Mojmіn mylyn mene zadzeno.
   my-JUST beloved-INST me-ACC betrayed-PASS
   (Shevelov 1963, p. 144) Agentive by-phrase
   I was betrayed by my beloved.

b. *Svoju zіnku bulo obmaneno.
   self's wife-ACC was deceived-PASS
   (Lavine 2000, p. 144, ex. (61a)) Bound Anaphores
   Intended: Someone deceived his wife.

c. *Povincȟys' dodonu, hroši bulo znajdено.
   returning home money was found-PASS
   (Lavine 2000, p. 90, ex. (Sh)) Subject Control
   Intended: Having returned home, the money was found.

d. *Umeretь/Pravovo̱tь/Prijato. Unaccusative intransitivs
died PASS/get.sick/PASS/arrived-PASS

These properties follow automatically from the assumption that the Ukrainian -natо construction is like the canonical passive in that no theta role is assigned to subject position and differs only in the fact that it retains the ability to assign accusative case, in violation of Burzio's Generalization. We assume that the verb can assign accusative case to the object because nominative case is assigned to a null expletive subject.¹

Unlike Polish, the Ukrainian construction allows the occurrence of the passive auxiliary bulo 'was'. Lavine (2000, ch. 3.2, 2001) takes the lack
of an auxiliary verb to be: the crucial factor underlying the syntactic reanalysis of -nacho in Polish. He hypothesizes that this inflectional ending was reanalyzed from a passive participle to a tense-marking auxiliary, a proposal which he refers to as the Aux Hypothesis, according to which Polish -nacho is a “new, analyzable morpheme with the dedicated function and distribution of an auxiliary” (Lavine 2000, p. 145). As we shall see, comparison with Icelandic suggests that the presence or absence of an auxiliary is not what determines the syntactic properties of the construction as passive or active. The auxiliary does, however, make it possible for the Ukrainian construction to mark different tenses and even to occur in contexts requiring an infinitival form, as illustrated in (15a) from Shevelov (1963, p. 145), cited by Sobin (1985, p. 659, ex. 21).

The cognate Polish construction is restricted to a past tense reading and, as illustrated in (13b), lacks an infinitival form.

(13) a. maję buy pokazano nisku. Ukrainian
    will be-INF shown-PASS series-ACC
    . . . a series will be shown

b. *Serie ma być pokazana. Polish
    series-ACC will be-INF shown-IMP

Lavine points to another difference with respect to control of the PRO subject of infinitival. Only the Polish -nacho construction can provide a controller for the embedded PRO, as illustrated in the following examples.

(14) a. Na wzgórzu zaczęto [PRO budować] dom. Polish
    on hill began-IMP build-INF house-ACC
    They began to build a house on the hill.

b. *do miast pochoćto [PRO budować mozu cerkwju]
    in city began-PASS build-INF new church-ACC
    They began to build a new church in the city. Ukrainian

To summarize, although the cognate Polish and Ukrainian constructions share the superficial morphological properties of assigning accusative case and the consequent lack of agreement, their syntactic behaviors are diametrically opposed. The obvious question, then, is this: which of the

[2] It is perhaps worth noting that Ukrainian may be developing an overt explosive subject, "Pro, which is found more frequently in the spoken language (Shevelov 1963, p. 148). See also Billings (1993) Lavine (2000, ch. 3.1.2.1); on the other hand, considers the explosive status question and suggests that in the cited example, *Pro is here analyzed in a fully referential neutral simplex process.}
two polar opposites does the innovative Icelandic construction most resemble?

3. The study

We now turn back to Icelandic. The "new impersonal" has received only scant attention in the linguistic literature. To our knowledge, the construction was first noted by Berndóttir (1982, p. 212), who cited three examples with 1st person sg. pronoun objects, accusative mig and dative mér. Hálfdanarson (1984, p. 31) provides the example in (15) as an example of a "language error;" a usage to be corrected.

(15) Language Error #174: Helgi Hálfdanarson 1984, p. 31
Hreyfa hefði þar var sagt honum að fara.
Heard: He was told him to leave.

RETT VÆR: Honum var sagt að fara.
CORRECT: He was told to leave.

Leibléttum þeirra hjá bónnum.
Let's correct this in children's speech.

Although elementary school teachers certainly recognize and correct this construction, the school system as a whole has not (yet) begun to marshal its forces against this construction as they have against the so-called Dative sickness (lígsfallssýki), which began around the turn of the century (Svaravsdóttir 1982). Sigurðsson (1989, p. 355) gives an example of the new construction containing a 3rd person pronominal object and reflexes (in, 60) that the new impersonal is much better with reflexive verbs. Finally, numerous examples of the new impersonal can be found in Kjartansson (1991), by far the most extensive discussion of the construction prior to our own studies.

We developed a questionnaire designed to test the predictions of our hypothesis that the "new impersonal" is on the way to becoming a syntactically active construction with a phonologically null pro subject, and to track the development of this innovative construction. Our questionnaire was a revised version of a pilot study conducted in the spring of 1996 and reported as Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (1997). The questionnaire was distributed to 1,731 tenth graders (age 15–16) in 65 schools throughout

\* We included one such sentence on our questionnaire: "mér lúgar í tí "me-DAT looks for its center". The acceptance rate for this sentence was 14% (Hreinn's) and 15% (Hrafnkell) and 4% (adults).
Iceland (see Figure 1) in the fall and winter of 1999–2000: this number represents 45% of the 3861 tenth-graders who took the national exams in the spring of 2000. The questionnaire was also given to 205 adult controls in various parts of the country.

The questionnaire contained 68 test sentences. There were 17 control sentences, both grammatical and ungrammatical. The remaining 51 sentences contained examples of the innovative construction in different syntactic environments. We tested transitive verbs governing accusative and dative case but not genitive since so few verbs govern genitive case on their objects. The sentences were presented in random order. An experimenter visited each class and instructed the subjects in how to fill out the questionnaire. For each sentence, subjects were asked to check one of two options, shown in (16). The instructions appeared at the top of the first page of the questionnaire and were also presented orally by the experimenter.

(16) **English translation of instructions at top of questionnaire**

Put an X in the appropriate column.

Yes = this is something one can say.
No = this is something one cannot say.

![Figure 1. Map of Iceland.](image-url)
After excluding subjects who made more than one error on the grammatical control sentences, we have results from 1,695 students, 845 males and 850 females, and 200 adults. All the results reported here are based on these subject numbers unless noted otherwise. In (17) we show the distribution of subjects across the country.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographical area</th>
<th>Adolescents</th>
<th>Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vesturland</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vestfirdur</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nordurland</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austurland</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vestmannavogur</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudurland</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudurnes</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outer Reykjavik</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner Reykjavik</td>
<td>220</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,695</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The population of Iceland is approximately 286,000; the population of Greater Reykjavik is approximately 178,000, more than half the population of the country. Since there was a striking difference in the results according to location of the schools tested, we divided Greater Reykjavik into Inner and Outer Reykjavik to make this difference even clearer. Inner Reykjavik is the area west of the river Ellidhal and north of Fossvegur; it consists of the old downtown or city center and the newer western part of the city, including the independent municipality of Seltjarnarnes. See Figure 2.

4. Results

As expected, many students judge the "new impersonal" as something they might say. The table in (18) shows the geographic variation in the acceptability rates for the "new impersonal" in the test sentences containing animate accusative and dative objects, simple examples of the innovative construction like those shown in (2).
(18) Geographical variation in acceptance of “new Impersonal” with animate objects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographical area</th>
<th>Accusative Objects</th>
<th>Dative Objects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adolescents</td>
<td>Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vesturland</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vestfirður</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norðurland</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austurland</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vestmannaeyjar</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suðurland</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suðurnes</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outer Reykjavík</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inner Reykjavík</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our results reveal a statistically significant relationship between geographical region and the acceptability judgments. There was a clear difference between Reykjavik and the rest of the country; the difference was even more striking once we divided Reykjavik into the two parts which we have called Inner and Outer Reykjavik. Subjects in Outer Reykjavik were nearly twice as likely to accept such examples of the "new impersonal" as subjects in Inner Reykjavik, and moreover this effect is highly significant. For sentences with accusative animate objects (9 sentences), the difference between Inner (M = 0.21, SD = 0.27) and Outer (M = 0.52, SD = 0.32) was highly significant, t(520.64) = 9.636, p = 0.000 (2-tailed). For sentences with dative animate objects (3 sentences), the difference between Inner (M = 0.35, SD = 0.34) and Outer (M = 0.64, SD = 0.37) was highly significant, t(581) = 8.119, p = 0.000 (2-tailed). However, the difference between Outer Reykjavik and the rest of the country, excluding Inner Reykjavik, was not significant. For sentences with accusative animate objects, the difference between Outer Reykjavik (M = 0.52, SD = 0.32) and the rest of the country (M = 0.51, SD = 0.33) was not significant, t(616.84) = -0.394, p = 0.694 (2-tailed); for sentences with dative animate objects, the difference between Outer Reykjavik (M = 0.60, SD = 0.37) and the rest of the country (M = 0.57, SD = 0.39) was not significant, t(207.91) = -1.018, p = 0.309 (2-tailed). This result justifies our combining Outer Reykjavik and the rest of the country into a single group labelled Elsewhere. Henceforth, the results for adolescents are divided into two groups, Elsewhere vs. Inner Reykjavik. For adults, however, there was no significant effect between geographical region and acceptability judgments, so for adults we report a single mean score. In the tables below, we report the results for adults in the right-most column; in the middle column are the results for adolescents in Inner Reykjavik, where the innovative construction is less advanced; and the results for all other adolescents are in the first column, labeled "Elsewhere."

4.1. Morphological case

One of the well-known properties of Icelandic is that lexically case-marked NPs behave syntactically exactly like NPs bearing syntactic case; they differ only in that lexical case is preserved under NP-movement. Thus we might expect the same to be true of the "new impersonal." However, Kjarastsson (1991, p. 18) speculated that the new construction was more

---

1 The numbers reported here are averaged acceptability scores after converting "Yes" responses to 1 and "No" responses to 0.
common with verbs governing dative than with verbs governing accusative. Our results, shown by the data in (18), strongly support this observation.

For adolescents, the difference between accusative (M = 0.61, SD = 0.33) and dative (M = 0.61, SD = 0.37) was highly significant, t(169) = −10.928, p = 0.000 (2-tailed). Even for adults, the difference between accusative (M = 0.03, SD = 0.10) and dative (M = 0.06, SD = 0.15) was significant, t(199) = −2.717, p = 0.007 (2-tailed). This result is consistent with the observations for Ukrainian/Polish that the change began with those forms where the morphological evidence of non-agreement is least obvious. Recall that for verbs governing dative objects, only the fact that a definite NP can occur in postverbal position marks a sentence as an example of the new construction; for verbs governing accusative objects, there are in addition the difference in morphological case and the consequent lack of agreement.

Although subjects consistently liked dative objects more than accusative ones, morphological case was clearly not always the deciding factor. Compare the near-minimal pair shown in (19), where the accusative (indirect) object was judged more acceptable by all groups.

(19) **Triadic verbs with ACC vs DAT indirect object and inifinitival complement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACC vs DAT on indirect object</th>
<th>Elsewhere</th>
<th>Inner</th>
<th>Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Präg var beöð mig að vaska upp.</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hérskpp was asked me-ACC to wash up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was asked to do the dishes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Präg var sagt nón að taka til.</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hérskpp was told me-DAT to clean up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was told to clean up.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It remains unclear to us what factors are at play here.

Our results also show that examples of the innovative construction were judged more acceptable if the object was animate, or, more precisely, [human]. One might speculate that the higher acceptability of dative

---

*It is interesting that animacy affects the choice between the bis-passive and the e-passive in Swedish, if the affected argument is human, either passive may be used, if the patient is inanimate, the e-passive is either more likely or the only possible choice, as illustrated by the example in cita. by Grim Englund (1999, p. 11).*
objects should be attributed to this preference for [human] objects. As discussed by Barðdal (1993), many transitive verbs assign either dative or accusative, depending on the animacy of the object (see also Malling to appear). This is illustrated by the following examples taken from Barðdal (1993, p. 4, ex. (6a, b)).

(20) a. Kristín hundtakóð. Christine washed the towel-DAT
    Chirstine washed the towel-ACC

b. Kristín barni. Chirstine washed the child-DAT

However, our data show that the preference for animate objects held regardless of morphological case. The data for adolescents are shown in table (21). Note that the effect is strongest in inner Reykjavík, where the new construction is less well-established; subjects in inner Reykjavík were more than twice as likely to accept an example of the new construction if the object was animate than if it was inanimate.

(21) Morphological case vs. animacy of object as factor in mean acceptability scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Elsewhere</th>
<th>Inner Reykjavík</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anim</td>
<td>Inanim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is striking that all of the examples of the innovative construction previously cited in the literature have human objects. Inanimate objects are not disallowed but such examples are attested (see (39c) below). However, it may be that the pragmatics of the innovative construction favor affected objects of highly transitive verbs in the sense of Hopper and Thompson (1980). Further research will be needed to test whether it is animacy or a high degree of transitivity that matters and to examine the discourse factors that govern the choice between the new construction and the canonical passive.

(39) a. Det drökk myndit af den kvöldin.
    A lot of beer was drunk that evening
    e-passive
    Beer was drunk much beer that evening
    b-passive
Regarding our results, it might be questioned whether 15- or 16-year-old adolescents are capable of making reliable grammaticality judgments. Any such objection can be countered by noting that for the control sentences, both grammatical and ungrammatical, adolescents gave similar responses to the adults. For the eleven grammatical control sentences, the mean acceptance rate in the various geographical areas ranges from a low of 89% to a high of 94% for adolescents, as compared to between 92% and 96% for adults. There is almost no difference between the different regions of the country, and there is no difference between Inner and Outer Reykjavik. One of the grammatical control sentences was the canonical passive shown in (22a). Our results show clearly that the adolescents accept the canonical passive just like adults do. Thus, our data show that for our subjects the innovative construction co-exists with the canonical passive, just as in Polish but unlike Irish where the innovative autonomous form drove out the canonical passive.

(22) Judgments on two control sentences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two control sentences</th>
<th>Elsewhere</th>
<th>Inner</th>
<th>Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olaf-NOM was driven from the school</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olaf was expelled from school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harald-masc a still sick near</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In (22b), we give one of the five ungrammatical control sentences that we tested. Our results show that subjects were paying attention to agreement since the neutral form of the adjective fails to agree with the masculine subject.¹

¹ It is worth noting some curious aspects of the results for ungrammatical control sentences. It may be that subjects paid less attention to word order than to agreement. One of the ungrammatical controls involved a V2 violation: I dag kónnar sé hún. "Today the teacher is sick." A surprising 19% of the adolescents and 14% of the adults accepted this sentence. However, when adult subjects who accepted it were asked to read it back, they read it with grammatical V2 order. While this might be interpreted as reflecting an unconscious correction, it is noteworthy that Paquot (2001) also found a surprisingly high acceptance rate for V2 violations. Further research is needed to determine how to interpret these results.
4.3. Sociological factors

Our data showed that there was no significant effect for gender on the acceptance of the new construction. However, there was a highly significant effect for the education levels of both mother and father at all levels (10 years of schooling: compulsory education, 14 years of school (mennaskóli), and university level) and for all geographical regions. The higher the level of parents’ education, the lower the acceptance rate for the new construction. In (23) we show the acceptance rates for examples of the new construction with possessive animate objects as a function of mother’s education, where 1 = compulsory education (10th grade), 2 = 14 years of schooling (mennaskóli; Gymnasium), and 3 = university level.

(23) Acceptance of “new impersonal” as a function of mother’s education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographical region</th>
<th>Mother’s education</th>
<th>Geographical region</th>
<th>Mother’s education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vesturland</td>
<td>1 71%</td>
<td>Suðurland</td>
<td>1 62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 66%</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 57%</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vestfirðir</td>
<td>1 67%</td>
<td>Suðurnes</td>
<td>1 73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 56%</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 50%</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norðurland</td>
<td>1 58%</td>
<td>Öxarhúsi</td>
<td>1 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 56%</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>2 50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 42%</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austurland</td>
<td>1 53%</td>
<td>Inner</td>
<td>1 33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 47%</td>
<td>Reykjavík</td>
<td>2 31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 41%</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vestmannaeyjar</td>
<td>1 62%</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 60%</td>
<td></td>
<td>2 60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 56%</td>
<td></td>
<td>3 56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Since not all subjects provided information about their parents’ education, those results are based on 1447 subjects and not 1600.
This is similar to the results among 11-year old children reported by Svavarðsdóttir (1982) in her study of dative-sickness. Recall that adolescents in Inner Reykjavík were not as likely to accept the new construction as adolescents in the rest of the country, as reported in the table in (1). We suspect that this reflects a sociological factor rather than a strictly geographic factor. Data from 1999 indicate that the population of Inner Reykjavík has the highest percentages of university education in the country (Morgunbladid, February 20, 2001). This might lead one to believe that the lower acceptance of the new construction in Inner Reykjavík is due to the higher levels of parental education in that area. However, a closer look at our data indicates that this hypothesis does not tell the whole story, since the acceptance rates are much lower in Inner Reykjavík than elsewhere in the country, independently of the education of the parents. For example, the percentage of ‘yes’ responses within Inner Reykjavík is only 33% for adolescents whose mothers completed only the compulsory level of education (10th grade) whereas the corresponding acceptance rates ranged from 53–73% elsewhere in the country. Multiple regression analysis shows that it is geographical region that affects the acceptability the most, independently of parental education. We will not pursue the reasons for these differences any further here, other than to consider the possibility that it might be connected to the academic success of students and their test-taking abilities. Among the schools in Inner Reykjavík that we tested in our study were those schools which received the highest average scores on the national exams in the spring of 2000. However, the results of our questionnaire on the new construction in various syntactic environments indicate that this syntactic change is further developed in the countryside than in Inner Reykjavík. If this change began earlier outside of Reykjavík, then it would be natural that the percentage of positive responses should be lower in Inner Reykjavík than out in the countryside. The observed differences, however, are so great that other factors must be at play (see Sigurjónsdóttir and Maling 2002 for further discussion).

5. Testing individual predictions

5.1. Grammatical function of the postverbal NP: subject or object?

Recall that our predictions are that the innovative construction is in the process of acquiring the syntactic properties listed in (C). First, we included a few sentences to test whether the postverbal NP in the new construction
could possibly be analyzed as a grammatical subject. The data in (24) and (25) show clearly that the accusative NP cannot occur in subject position, namely between the finite verb and the participle, either in direct yes-no questions or in declaratives.

(24) **Accusative in subject position in direct questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accusative in subject position in direct questions</th>
<th>Elsewhere</th>
<th>Inner Adults</th>
<th>Rvkr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Var stállkona lamið í klesu? <em>was the girl ACC beaten in a mess</em></td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Var lýkastu teklið af honum? <em>was the keys-ACC taken from him</em></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Var hana skilid eftir heima? <em>was she-ACC left behind at home</em></td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Var þig spurt margra spurninga? <em>was you-ACC asked many questions</em></td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(25) **Accusative in subject position in declaratives**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accusative in subject position in declaratives</th>
<th>Elsewhere</th>
<th>Inner Adults</th>
<th>Rvkr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Í íger var Harald sótt seini í skólan. <em>yesterday was Harold songi late at school</em></td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yesterday Harold was picked up late from school.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Eftir matina var mig bæði að vasku upp. <em>after the meal was me asked to wash up</em></td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After dinner I was asked to do the dishes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

*We have an explanation for the unexpectedly high incopetibility of (24d). Possible factors that need to be investigated include the productivity of the verb and whether the previous is 1st, 2nd or 3rd person.*
These results show clearly the the postverbal NPs are not postposed subjects of a passive voice verb but should instead be analyzed as objects of an active voice construction.

Another property that distinguishes subjects from objects is the Definiteness Effect, which constrains postposed subjects. Some linguists have speculated that the lack of the Definiteness Effect might be a general feature of the grammar of speakers who use the “new impersonal” (Gudnasondottir 2000, p. 171, fn. 77). Our data indicates that this speculation is incorrect, as shown in (26), where the acceptance rate is extremely low.

(26) **Definiteness Effect on postverbal (VP-internal) subjects**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definite Nominative NP in object position where</th>
<th>Elsewhere</th>
<th>Inner adults</th>
<th>Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>pað hæfð konuð Ólafur</em> of seint í skóla</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>í esc toos late in marga daga</em> school in many days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that this is not an example of the new construction but an active voice sentence with a definite subject in the nominative case and expletive *pað* in sentence-initial position. Comparable sentences with indefinite subjects in VP-internal position are perfectly grammatical, as shown in (3a) and (4a). These results indicate that the postverbal NP in the innovative construction is a grammatical object, not a subject, and thus support the analysis sketched above in (6b).

5.2. **Agentive by-phrase**

Although overt agentive by-phrases are much less common in Icelandic than in English, they are grammatical in the canonical passive. To test whether subjects accept overt agentive by-phrases, we included in the control sentences two canonical passives with an overt by-phrase, one sentence containing a transitive verb governing a dative object, the other a verb taking an infinitival complement. The results shown in (27) indicate that by and large adolescents accept such sentences as fully grammatical, just like adults.
(27) **Agentive by-phrase in grammatical control sentences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agentive by-phrase in grammatical control sentences</th>
<th>Else</th>
<th>Inner</th>
<th>Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Honum var sagt upp af forstjórnunum.</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>he-DAT was fixed PRT by the.director</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Pað var sambyykkt af öllum í hekknum að fara í klfs.</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>it was agreed PRT by all PRT in</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>the.class to go bowling</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a syntactically active sentence, on the other hand, co-occurrence of an agentive by-phrase with the thematic subject (either overt or phonologically null) would constitute a Theta-Criterion Violation. Recall that in Polish, agentive by-phrases are fine in the canonical passive but robustly ungrammatical in the *noko* construction, where native speakers report that a by-phrase is simply "redundant." Thus if the innovative construction is syntactically active as we hypothesize, we predict that the presence of a by-phrase should be ungrammatical. The questionnaire contained two examples of the new construction designed to test this prediction. The results shown in (28) indicate that this prediction is largely confirmed: while not fully ungrammatical among speakers who accept the "new impersonal", the by-phrase is significantly less acceptable than in the canonical passive.

(28) **Agentive by-phrase in the innovative construction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agentive by-phrase</th>
<th>Else</th>
<th>Inner</th>
<th>Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Pað var skóðað bilinn af bývalarvkjárum.</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>he inspected the.car PRT by the.mechanic</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Pað var sagt honum íf af forstjórnunum.</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>he fixed him PRT by the.director</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The contrast is shown clearly by the minimal pair in (29a) vs. (29b), where (29a) is a canonical passive, and (29b) is unambiguously the new impersonal construction; both contain overt by-phrases. The sentence in (29c)
is an example of the new construction without a by-phrase. We wouldn’t expect adolescents in Inner Reykjavík to like (29b, c) very much with or without the by-phrase because these sentences are unambiguously instances of the new construction, but even here the presence of an agentive by-phrase clearly makes the sentence less acceptable.\textsuperscript{10}

(29) \textbf{Minimal Pair}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agentive by-phrase</th>
<th>Else-where Inner Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>\textit{Honum} var sagt upp af forstjóranum.</td>
<td>he-DAT was fired PRT by the director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$87%$</td>
<td>$93%$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{Bøð} var sagt \textit{honum} upp af forstjóranum.</td>
<td>$19%$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$H_{299}$ was told all the kids to go home.</td>
<td>$74%$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3. Binding of anaphors

If the subject position in the “new impersonal” construction is a theta-position, then binding of anaphors in nonsubject positions should be possible since there is a thematic subject to bind such an anaphor. The questionnaire contained thirteen sentences designed to test this prediction, four with a plain reflexive sig, two with the compound self-anaphor.

\textsuperscript{10} As pointed out to us by Horkalinrud Thórsson, it is not generally possible to have an agent by-phrase with definite agent in ordinary passive voice passives, as illustrated in (i, ii):

\begin{itemize}
  \item[(i)] \textit{Bøð} var sagt upp af forstjóranum. (\textit{he} was told up from the manager).
  \textit{H}_{299} was told up from the manager.
  \textit{H}_{299} was fired PRT by the director, people, DAT by the director.
  \textit{H}_{299} was fired PRT by the director, people, DAT by the director.
  \textit{H}_{299} was fired PRT by the director, people, DAT by the director.
\end{itemize}

Although the new construction resembles passives like those in (i); the crucial difference is that the possessor NP in the new construction is definite rather than indefinite. Recall that the new construction is especially used to describe a specific event. We think that the understood agent in the new construction can refer to a specific individual, just like the object. Consider the example in (iii), where the understood agent is more likely a specific individual.

\begin{itemize}
  \item[(iii)] \textit{Bøð} var sagt upp af forstjóranum. (\textit{he} was told up from the manager).
  \textit{H}_{299} was told me to go home.
\end{itemize}

For these reasons, we think (i) the test sentences in (28) bear on the hypothesis being tested.
The results are given in (30)–(33). As can be seen in (30), our results indicate that simple reflexive objects in the “new impersonal” construction are judged highly acceptable, just as acceptable, in fact, as non-reflexive objects.\textsuperscript{11}

(30) Binding of sig-anaphors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sig-anaphor</th>
<th>Else</th>
<th>Inner</th>
<th>Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Svo var bara dríðó sig á báll.</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>then was just hurried \textit{REFL} to the dance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Páð var haldið sig innan dýnu.</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{VERB} was kept \textit{REFL} in doors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{út af óvðrinnu},</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>due to bad weather</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Páð var skoðað sig um á svæðiðu.</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{VERB} was looked \textit{REFL} around in the area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People looked around the area.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Páð var farði hemm til sínum.</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>\textit{VERB} was gone \textit{REFL} home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People went home.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This confirms Sigurðsson’s speculation (1989/1992, p. 235) that the new construction is best with reflexive verbs.\textsuperscript{12} This result is not surprising

\textsuperscript{11} Statistical analysis shows that a given speaker tends to either accept all of the example sentences in (30) or reject them all. If an addressee accepts one of these sentences, then he/she is likely to accept the others. Note that the verbs in these examples are all obligatorily reflexive. In future studies we will compare the behavior of inherently reflexive verbs like \textit{leika} or “play” with verbs like \textit{etak “sleep” and baka “bake”}, which optionally take reflexive objects.

\textsuperscript{12} Sigurðsson (1989, p. 355, fn. 66) gives the following two examples:

(32) a. 7 páð var leikad sót allan daginn. | 78% | 67% | 40% |
| \textit{VERB} was played \textit{REFL} all day |

(33) b. Páð var þaktað sig á lagaraðgin. | 72% | 43% | 31% |
| \textit{VERB} was blessed \textit{REFL} on Saturday |

The judges indicated an Sigurðsson’s note not in a pilot study in Hvitaustadaskóli in Inner Reykjavík, only 1 out of 25 subjects judged this ungrammatical (cf. Björnsdóttir 1997).
since in many languages, verbs with reflexive objects behave syntactically like intransitive verbs (Selkirk, Zaenen and Zec 1987). Recall that, as reported in the table in (18), only 25% of adolescents in Inner Reikjavík accepted comparable sentences with nonreflexive accusative objects; in other words, subjects in Inner Reikjavík were twice as likely to accept a sentence with a reflexive object than a sentence with a nonreflexive accusative object. Even more striking is that between 30–40% of adult subjects accepted the examples with a reflexive object. Adults were four times as likely to accept a sentence with a reflexive object as to accept a sentence with a nonreflexive accusative object, which would unambiguously be an instance of the new construction (see the table in (18)). We suggest that this represents the first step in the reanalysis of the past participle from passive to syntactically active.

As illustrated in (31), self-anaphors were judged slightly less acceptable, and not surprisingly, reciprocals the least acceptable, as illustrated in (32). Both these types of anaphors require agreement in case and number.

(31) Binding of self-anaphors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-anaphor</th>
<th>Elsewhere</th>
<th>Inner</th>
<th>Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| a. *síða* var horfði á sjálfinn sig í speglinum. *síða* var horfði á sjálfinn sig í speglinum.  
  hörði was looked at SELF in the mirror | 58%       | 48%   | 34%    |
| b. *síða* var beint á sjálfinn sig á myndinni. *síða* var beint á sjálfinn sig á myndinni.  
  beint was pointed to SELF in the picture     | 19%       | 11%   | 13%    |

(32) Binding of reciprocals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reciprocals</th>
<th>Elsewhere</th>
<th>Inner</th>
<th>Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| a. *það* var ekki hlustuð á hvernum annan. *það* var ekki hlustuð á hvernum annan.  
  hlustuð was not listened to each other á fundinum.  
  at the meeting | 37%       | 25%   | 13%    |
| b. *það* var hjálpað hverjuð varu. *það* var hjálpað hverjuð varu.  
  hjálpað was helped each other med verkelnið.  
  with the assignment                                 | 14%       | 8%    | 1%     |
### Binding of possessive reflexives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possessive Reflexive</th>
<th>Elsewhere</th>
<th>Inner Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Possessive Reflexive</strong></td>
<td><strong>63%</strong></td>
<td><strong>49%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Pað var haldið med sinu loði.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>itself was held with SELF’s team</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People supported their (own) team.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Á kvöldinn var skóðuð tölupóskinn</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>in the evening was checked e-mail</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sinu, <em>SELF’s</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Í morgun var brúna systur sinu</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>this morning was pushed sister SELF’s</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>af loðinu. off the bike</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Pað var klipt hárið á díukkan síni.</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>itself was cut the hair on doll SELF’s</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Pað var oft kaffað broður sin</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>often dunked brother SELF</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>í sundlauginu. in the pool</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in (33), the acceptability rates for the five examples containing possessive reflexives varied tremendously, from a high of 63% to a low of 5% outside of Inner Reykjavík. Note also the relatively high percentage of adults (36%) who judged (33a) acceptable. This example contains an intransitive verb and is therefore an instance of the impersonal passive. We suggest that speakers who accept the possessive reflexive analyze the impersonal passive as a syntactically active construction. Our data shows a kind of “step effect” whereby the acceptance rate increases from 36% for adults to nearly 50% for adolescents in Inner Reykjavík, to 63% for adolescents elsewhere in Iceland, suggesting that this analysis of impersonal passives is steadily increasing, independently of the new construction. Sentence (33b), which contains a transitive verb, is on the other hand clearly an example of the new construction, so it is not surprising
that the acceptability rates for this sentence are much lower than for
(33a).13 We suggest that the low acceptability of the examples in (33c-e)
do not reflect the ungrammaticality of bound anaphors per se but rather
the unnaturalness of the given examples under an impersonal reading; they
would also be judged unnatural if maður 'one' (lit. 'man') were used as
subject.

5.4. Subject-oriented adjuncts

As is well-known, the implicit agent in a passive can license various
types of agent-oriented adjuncts including purpose phrases, as illustrated
in (34).

(34) a. Sjónum var mokði vandlega yfir hraði.
the snow was shoveled carefully over the carcass

b. Mottun var barin af kappi.
the rag was beaten with seal

c. Bátum var hvít viliandi.
the boat was copiced on purpose

(Zimmer and Maling 1984/1990, (4c))

However, certain other adjuncts seem to require a syntactic (subject)
controller, as illustrated by the oddity of the examples in (35).

(35) a. ?? Hundurinn var barinn hágráinandi.
the dog was beaten crying

b. ?? Valsinn var dansaður skellihlægandi.
the waltz was danced laughing uproariously

The grammatical subject in (35a), hundurinn 'the dog,' is not generally
considered to be a suitable subject for the verb gruta 'to cry'; in (35b)
the grammatical subject is an inanimate noun, vals 'waltz,' which is not
a suitable controller for the verb höfja 'to laugh'; hence the sentences are

---

13 The data might be interpreted as evidence of a multiplicative effect. The average acceptability rate
for examples of the new construction with accusative objects was about 60% for adolescents
outside of lower Reykjavík, i.e. Elsewhere; this multiplied by the 63% acceptability rate for (33a)
yields 38%, which is not unlike the actual 32% rate. The same is true for baðir Reykjavík, where
28% of the adolescents accepted the new construction with accusative objects. Multiplying this
by the 49% acceptability rate for (33a) yields 14%, which is close to the observed 10%.
judged ungrammatical.11 Many speakers find it difficult to interpret the understood agent as the controller. The question then is whether such participial adjuncts can be used with passives of intransitive verbs, as illustrated in (36).

(36) Páð var dansð skellihljóndandi á skipinu.  

\[ \text{páð was danced. laughing inappropriately on the ship} \]

Sentence (36) should be ungrammatical in the standard language because there is no referential agent subject to serve as controller for the participial adjunct skellihljóndandi. This was expressed by the intuition of one native speaker that “someone is amusing.” On the other hand, we predict that speakers of the “new impersonal” should feel no such lack of an agent since, by hypothesis, the construction has a thematic subject to serve as syntactic controller for the participial adjunct.

The questionnaire contained three sentences designed to test this prediction, two impersonal passives formed from intransitive verbs (37a, b) and one from a transitive verb exemplifying the new construction (37c).

The results, shown in (37), largely confirm the expectation. Note that even in Inner Reykjavik, participial adjuncts with intransitive impersonal passives are accepted by approximately half the subjects. Not surprisingly, the third sentence with a transitive verb is judged much less acceptable in Inner Reykjavik where the innovative construction is less widespread, and by adults.

(37) Subjett-oriented Participial Adjuncts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participial Adjuncts</th>
<th>Elsewhere</th>
<th>Inner Reykjavik</th>
<th>Adults</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Páð var komið skellihljóndandi í tímann.</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ \text{páð was come laughing into class} ]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Páð var farið hágriðandi heim.</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ \text{páð was gone crying home} ]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Páð var lesið minningargreinina gráandi.</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ \text{páð was read the memorial article crying} ]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11 Hestadóttir Thórisdóttir (p.c.) points out that such sentences can be improved given suitable context.

(1) Ella að hópurinn vórðu lítt aftur þar sem þeir hófðaðu varu tliðuður  

\[ \text{after the headteacher had told that they were less} \]

dances danced. laughing inappropriately
What is surprising is that approximately 50% of adults also accepted sentences like (37a, b). Barddal and Molnár (2000, p. 128) consider such sentences grammatical and suggest that such subject-oriented adjuncts "can be controlled by the underlying agent in impersonal passive sentences which do not contain a thematic subject." Our data indicates that there are actually two different groups of native speakers and presumably two different grammars. It is important to note that for both adolescents and adults, there is a highly significant correlation between the results for subject-oriented adjuncts and those for simple reflexives shown in (30).

The more subject-oriented participles we accepted, the more simple reflexives are accepted. Although it is certainly possible to allow statements in the grammar to the effects that the underlying agent can be a controller for subject-oriented adjuncts, such a constraint would not capture the correlation between this and the acceptance of reflexive objects as our analysis does.

5.5. Unaccusative verbs

The canonical passive is subject to certain well-known lexical restrictions. In standard Icelandic, as in many languages, only verbs with external arguments form passives. These fall into two classes: (a) agentive verbs and (b) most psych verbs with nominative subjects. One obvious consequence is that unaccusative verbs do not form passives (see Perlman 1978). It is commonly assumed that the passive morpheme is an argument which requires a theta-role (Baker 1988; Baker, Johnson and Roberts 1989). Since by hypothesis, unaccusative verbs have no external theta-role, they cannot assign that theta role to the passive zephoreme in l, which is external to VP. If, however, the innovative construction is syntactically active, as we hypothesize, then we would not expect to find the same lexical restrictions as in the canonical passive. It is worth noting that in both Polish and Irish, where a similar syntactic development has already been completed, unaccusative verbs do occur with the relevant "impersonal" morphology provided that the understood subject is [alien].

Passives of unaccusative verbs are sharply ungrammatical in all the Germanic languages that allow intransitive verbs to form passives, including standard Icelandic. To test for changes in lexical restrictions in Icelandic, we constructed five sentences containing unaccusative verbs.

3 For adolescents, the correlation was very significant (r = 0.433, n = 1693, p < 0.0001).
4 For adults, the correlation was also very significant (r = 0.532, n = 396, p < 0.0001).
2-tailed. 
with nonagent subjects: detta "to fall", konu "to arrive", svína "to sweat", keppto "to disappear" and dýyja "to die." The results shown in (38) indicate that the innovating construction is indeed beginning to extend its usage to nonagentive verbs which do not form passives in the standard language.

The range of acceptability rates for individual verbs is extremely wide, from a high of 55% with dýyja "to fall" to a low of 14% for dýyja "to die" for adolescents outside of Inner Reykjavík.

(38) **Unaccusative verbs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unaccusative verbs</th>
<th>Elsewhere</th>
<th>Inner Rvík</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Páð var donúð í bákkinni frýri.</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>framan blokkina.</td>
<td></td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the apartment building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Í morgun var kvarð of seint í skólinn.</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>this morning was arrived too late to school</td>
<td></td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Ekkert svínað í last night was not at all sweated in</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>svefnspíkanum.</td>
<td></td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the sleeping bag</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Páð var borðið sporðast í</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hreyf was disappeared traced in</td>
<td></td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stjórnustreðinum.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the carwars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Páð var daðið í bólýsinnu.</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>itreyf was died in the car accident</td>
<td></td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. Onsdal and Moltó (2000, p. 129) argue that (37a) is possible because speakers interpret it as an agentive and actional verb, i.e., as an imperative. While this is a plausible account for some examples (see 14 below), it is dubious for the example since the verb dýyja "to fall" cannot be used to describe intentional falling in Icelandic, and the semantics of the given example (disjunct in text) makes an agentive reading implausible.

19. As has frequently been pointed out, such unaccusative verbs may form impersonal passives when they can be interpreted as actional actions, as in the following example from Thórsen (1998, 16.5):
We assume that there must be some semantic difference among these
unaccusative verbs that accounts for the variable behavior. Höskuldur
Thráinsson (p.c., suggests that verbs denoting change of location are better
than verbs denoting change of state. One might speculate that changes
in the lexical restrictions on a particular morphology are the last stage in
the reanalysis from impersonal passive to a syntactically active construc-
tion. But note that in fact, adults like (3b, c, d) as much as the adoles-
cents do, and crucially, they accept these examples of impersonal passives
to a much greater extent than they accept definite postverbal objects. We
return to this below in our speculations as to why this change is occur-
rning in Icelandic.

6. Conclusions

The results support our hypothesis that what looks like a morphological
passive is well along the way to being reanalyzed as a syntactically active
construction with a phonologically null impersonal subject. Although the
absolute numbers in the various geographical regions differ, namely Inner
Reykjavik versus Elsewhere, the relative acceptability judgments are
mostly the same. This indicates that we are tapping into psychologically
real linguistic intuitions. The obvious questions are: why is this innova-
tion happening, and when did it start?

6.1. History of the construction

When did the innovation begin? The "new impersonal" apparently dates
back only a few decades. Our data show that although the new construc-
tion is common among adolescents, most adults consider it ungrammat-
ical. However, we have collected a few examples from speakers now in

---

3) Einn er þurr og díd fura þúðurhand.
still be fought and died for the fatherland

Since such recorded writings do not bear on our hypothesis, we have deliberately chosen
cases which never a nonverbal interpolation, and note, e.g., the falling or dying of an
object or event.

4) According to this suggestion, the results for atina ‘to sweat’ and dýrka ‘to die’ ought to be
similar and in fact both verbs show changes of state. Further research is needed to determine
exactly what factors are relevant.
their forties and fifties. The oldest examples that we know of are from 1959 and 1968.

(39) a. Pað var bólusett okkur.
   Ísland was inoculated to
   We got inoculated.

   (girl born in Akureyri, 1951)

b. Pað var gefið mér nummi.
   Ísland was given me-DAT candy-ACC
   Someone gave me candy.

   (girl, born in Akranes, 1958)

c. Pað var númælust þessum vinnubráðum.
   Ísland was opposed these procedures-DAT
   People opposed these procedures.

   (male, born in Vestfirðir, 1942)

d. Pað var trúflað mig í
   Ísland was disturbed me-ACC at [the]
   tek þásturna.
   end [of] the program-GEN
   Someone disturbed me at the end of the program.

   (male, born in Norðurland, 1950)

e. Pað var jarðað hanna f græ.
   Ísland was buried-neut.sg. him-ACC yesterday
   He was buried yesterday.

   (male, born in Norðurland, 1941)

A teacher recalls having heard his 8-year old niece from Akureyri, in Norðurland, say the sentence in (39a) in 1959; the girl’s mother doesn’t think the construction was common at the time. A woman in Akranes, in Vesturland, recalls having been horrified when she heard her 10-year old daughter say the sentence in (39b) in 1968, and reports that this construction was quite common among children in Akranes in the late sixties. The daughter remembers being corrected by her mother. When they moved to Reykjavík in 1972, they observed that the construction was hardly used at all in the capital city (Haraldsdóttir 1997, p. 22).

79 Thanks to Þórhallur Ellipson for example (39b). Note that the canonical passive of the ditransitive in (39b) would be hlíðar var gefð nummi, because oblique NPs can be grammatical subjects in Icelandic. NP-movement of one of the two internal arguments is obligatory in the standard language.
Although the new construction is most noticeable in the spoken language of children and adolescents, it is also found in the speech of adults, as illustrated by the examples in (30c–e), which are recent examples brought to our attention by linguists and other observers of the language. The fact that all the speakers are from outside Reykjavik is consistent with our data showing that the new construction is more widespread outside of the capital city.

We have also collected examples from children, some of which are shown in (40).

(40) a. Pað var fundið peysuna mín miða dag.
    *It was found Sweater mine today,*

b. Pað liffur veðið gefið þér of þokku.
    *It has been given you often cookies*

c. Í gerð þegar pað var gefið mó r lízi þá ...
    *Yesterday when it was given me cod liver oil, then ...*

d. Tígrí heldur að pað hluti veðið næst þónunum.
    *Tigger thinks that it has been kidnapped him*

Especially interesting is the following exchange between a 3½ year old girl and her mother who were talking about a picture of a thief in a storybook (see Halldórsdóttir 1997, p. 23):

(41) Child: Pað er bandið þónunum.

    *It is tied him-DAT*

    He is tied up.

    . . .

Mother: Hvinnig er þett, með karlinn?

    *how is this with the guy*

    What is it with this guy?

Child: Hann er hindður.

    he-NOM is tied [up]
It is interesting that the child used the wrong object case in the "new impersonal" construction; the verb binds to "bund" (i.e., "to bind, tie up") governs accusative case in the adult language. Recall that we found a higher acceptance rate for verbs assigning dative than for verbs assigning accusative, both here and in our pilot study (Malling and Sigurjónsdóttir 1997). The child also used a weak past participial form, bindiður, instead of the correct participle bindur for the strong verb binda. If the child's second sentence is indeed a passive rather than an active with predicate adjective, then this evidence shows that the new construction co-exists in the grammars of children, just as it does in the grammar of adolescents, and suggests that the "new impersonal" and the standard passive are functionally equivalent.

6.2. Why in Icelandic?

The syntactic reanalysis from passive to active is neither unnatural nor unique since a similar diachronic development has occurred independently in both Polish and Irish. But why is it happening in Icelandic? It is clearly not foreign influence since some of the other languages commonly spoken by Icelanders has this construction. So this change cannot, for example, be blamed on English. Nor can it be blamed on the corrupting influence of the big city, a common theme in modern Icelandic literature. As far as we know, there are no indications that a similar change lies on the horizon in any other Scandinavian language. 20

But we should speculate a bit on its origins in Icelandic. First, in all Germanic languages, the understood agent of an impersonal passive can only be interpreted as a human. In (42), the impersonal passives of the verb meaning "to whistle" can only be understood as describing human whistlers, not trains or teakettles.

---

20 As Martin Haspelmath and Hans Bock (p. 236) have pointed out, there does exist a non-standard construction in German:

\[ \text{Ex.} \quad \text{Bücher gelesen.} \]

Note that the construction needs to allow only determinable nouns; since plural nouns don't distinguish NOM from ACC in German, the claim that the nominal argument is ACC is based on the lack of agreement. The theoretical knowledge that NOM and agreement are strongly constrained. Although this resembles the new Icelandic construction in that the finite verb fails to agree with the nominal argument, it differs in that the NP needs to be indefinite and independent. Native speakers feel that this resembles noun incorporation, a process which creates an inanimate verb which could then form an impersonal passive.
(42) The understood agent of an Impersonal Passive is necessarily [+human]
a. Psað var hlautað. (Icelandic)
b. Det vässlande. (Swedish)
c. Es wurde gepiffen. (German)
d. Er werd door de jongen's de trein geëisten. (Dutch)

There was whistling by the boys.* the train whistled

As argued by Malin (1993), this semantic generalization which also holds of the PRO-arb subject of uncontrollable intransitive subjects, sets the stage for the reanalysis of a thematically empty null subject as a fully thematic pro external argument. Note that the same semantic restriction holds of the personal passive in Icelandic.

(43a) Snjófjöldið eyðilagt háðið. (Active)
the avalanche destroyed the house

b. *Háðið var eyðilagt í snjófjöldingu. (Passive)
the house was destroyed in the avalanche

c. Háðið eyðilagði í snjófjöldingu. (Middle)
the house was destroyed in the avalanche

In the active voice, the subject of a transitive verb like eyðilaga 'destroy' can be a natural force such as fire, storm, flood, or avalanche. However, in a personal passive like (43b), the understood agent must be a human. This sentence cannot mean that the avalanche destroyed the house, a meaning which is rendered by the morphological middle in (43c). Sentence (43b) could only be interpreted to mean that some human destroyed the house during the avalanche or triggered an avalanche in order to destroy the house.

The reanalysis from passive to active impersonal can thus be seen as a simplification of the grammar. Passivization involves suppression of the external argument. Since external arguments can be natural forces (causes) as well as human agents, the restriction to [+human] agents that holds in Icelandic requires an additional stipulation. However, once the construction is reanalyzed as a syntactically active construction, the [+human] restriction is a natural one since thematic role, e.g., agent, is not a classificatory feature for pronouns whether overt or null. Pronouns can vary for person, number, gender, and animacy/-[human] but not for thematic role.
On the other hand, nothing forces this reanalysis. As illustrated at (43) for Norwegian, the impersonal passive in the mainland Scandinavian languages has all the properties of the canonical passive and shows none of the properties of the innovative Icelandic construction. (The same properties hold of Swedish except that an agentive by-phrase is not allowed.)

Norwegian Impersonal Passives

a.returns was essere by one and all in the village Agentive by-phrase

b.*Det ble hygget seg. Bound Anaphors

\textit{Det} ble læst seg (selv) inne i fabrikkene. 
\textit{Det} ble lyttet til hverandre på møtet.

\textit{Det} ble dønt (tegne/leende/full/falle/full.)

c.*Det ble dønt tegned/tegne/tegne/tegne/tegne Subject Control

d.*Under krigen ble det forsømt Unaccusative verbs during the war was hit disappeared
tørk over spor. often without a trace

So what is different in Icelandic? It is surely relevant that in the mainland Scandinavian languages, unlike Icelandic, the passive is not restricted to [+human] agents; this is illustrated for Norwegian in (45).

(45) Huset ble ødelagt av stormen. (Norwegian)
The house was destroyed by the storm

Based on our study of the new impersonal in Iceland, this stage of the analysis seems to be the extension of the impersonal passive to inherently reflexive predicates; this then extends to non-inherent reflexives and other bound anaphors. Recall that, as shown in tables (30)–(33), even adult speakers accept bound anaphors in impersonal passives to a fairly high degree. Moreover, as shown in (37), many adults also accept control of participial adjectives, and many accept impersonal passives of presumably unaccusative verbs with unspecified human subjects. All of these
factors indicate that even in the standard language, passive morphology is associated with a human agent reading, which makes possible the reanalysis as an unspecified human subject construction. Furthermore, as noted by Sigurðsson (1989, p. 322, fn. 48), by-phrases are generally "ungrammatical or felicitous in impersonal passives" in Icelandic.

Another factor contributing to the reanalysis is the existence of other impersonal subject constructions, for example, the modal or aspectual use of certain verbs: vera 'be', verað 'become, must', fera 'go', bryja 'begin', hattu 'stop'. Sigurðsson (1989, p. 356) discusses the Impersonal Modal Construction, illustrated in (46), and suggests that these also involve an arbitrary pro-subject.

(46) **Impersonal Modal Construction**

\[ \text{púð verdur [e] að kjósa hana.} \quad \text{(Sigurðsson 1989, p. 356, ex. (26))} \]

Someone has to elect her. We have to elect her.

It is striking that aspectual verbs like vera 'be', fera 'go', bryja 'begin', hattu 'stop' form impersonal passives:21

(47) \[ \text{púð var farð} [að PRO moła snjólinn i-gæ], it was gone to PRO shovel the snow-ACC yesterday.
\]

People began shovelling the snow yesterday.

(The attested example of the new construction shown in (48a)) seems to be the functional equivalent of the impersonal passive of aspectual vera 'to be', the same verb used as the passive auxiliary.

(48) a. "I gær þegar það var gefið mér lísi, þá ..." yesterday when it was given me cod-liver oil, then ... (girl, age 4:4)

b. Í gær þegar var verið að gefa (standard language)

yesterday when it had been to give mér lísi, þá ... me cod-liver oil, then ...

Yesterday when they were giving me cod liver oil, then ...

---

21 Sigurðsson (1989, p. 57) accounts for this by hypothesizing that these aspectual verbs optionally select an external theta role.
It seems likely that such constructions in the standard language serve as models for the reanalysis of the impersonal morphological passive as a syntactically active impersonal construction.

In conclusion, our results show unambiguously that the new construction represents an ongoing syntactic change and not just the current fashion or fad in the language of children and adolescents. Although it is most common in the speech of the young, it is also found in the unsupervised speech of adults. Although least accepted in Inner Reykjavik, the construction has spread throughout the country and has extended into a variety of syntactic constructions. We cannot emphasize too strongly that we are reporting on a syntactic change that is still very much in progress. The results reported here are the first step in what we hope will be an ongoing project designed to track the development of this innovative construction.

Appendix - Test sentences on questionnaire

1. Fódu var próði Olaf á skólanum. Olaf was driven Olaf-ACC from the school
   Olaf ACC was kicked out of school.
2. Mán var stýrið af því atvinnu og af 
   the was left behind at grandma and grandpa's
3. Fódu var flógur desatins. Skópsins 
   The trash was thrown the.trash DAT on the.trashpot
   The trash was thrown onto the pile.
4. Fódu var sérstak smá af blómtínam
   He was fired by the director.
   He was fired by the director.
5. Móður var korið af settu á skólanum.
   This morning was come too late in school
   This morning someone/people arrived at school too late.
6. Svo var nýtt um á híll.
   So was built above REFL the hill
   So people just burried off to the dance.
7. Í dag skólabær er stúdent.
   Today the.student is sick
8. Fódu var lægur hana að atvinnu
   The trash was hidden her-ACC the.trash DAT
   The trash was hidden from her.
9. Íða var khippt hirt Í díssum stínu. 
Rektas was cut. "the hair on the doll" REFL.
The hair on the doll was cut.

10. Í dag var þréttað heim til ferðarveini. 
Sóta was planted home to the parents.
Today they planted home to the parents.

11. Íða var best á sjálftun síg á myndinum. 
Bóta was pointed to self REFL in the picture.
People pointed to themselves in the picture.

12. Íg blíkkja til plána. 
Ír-look forward to Christmas.

13. Íða var hjálpð húnrið hörrið með verkið.
Bóta was helped each other-DAT with the assignment.
People helped each other with the assignment.

14. Var stíkkurna launí í lífuð? 
Vasu-DATACC house to pieces
Was the girl badly beaten up?

15. Íða var haldað með vinu lítið. 
Bóta was held with REFL wine.
People rooted for their own team.

16. Íða var sýnt þver-sýnt fyrir þessi til íslanska. 
Rektas was collected means-DAT for trip to abroad.
Money was collected for a trip abroad.

17. Íða var sagt þann kristurinn, að fára helm. 
Bóta was said all the kids-DAT to go home.
The kids were all told to go home.

18. Í gær var Harald skóla við skóla. 
Skiptaz was went to school.
yesterday was Harald-DAT school last in school.
Yesterday Harald was picked up late at school.

19. Íða var þínuð skólablæðuðið ín í tumnu. 
Kráta was come laughing in in class.

at the meeting was read letters from the principal.
A letter from the school principal was read at the meeting.

21. Íða hefur komið Óður af veiti í skóla í marga daga. 
Bóta has come (Óður) has late in school in many days
For many days Öður has arrived at school too late.
22. Það var lanð — bartíð í klínu.
vað was beaten — the child beaten, in pieces
The child was badly beaten up.

23. Það var skuldr hana eftir heimna.
vað was slipped her-ACC behind at home
She was left behind at home.

24. Þú þriðir þær af þjölfingina.
you pushed me DAT off the bike REFLEX-3rd pers.
You pushed me off the bike.

25. Það var þiffr spólsaut í ajarunarhúsan.
vað was disappeared transitiv in the farmhouse
In our farm, people disappeared without a trace.

26. Vör þeg spørst margt spurningu?
vað are-ACC asked many question
Were you asked many questions?

27. Það var holdið sig sinni dýru at af tveðrincu.
vað was held REFLEX within drives out of the bad weather
People stayed indoors because of the bad weather.

28. Ólafur var íkman í skólaúrin.
vað was driven out of school
Ólaf was kicked out of school.

29. Í gætur var takki fandarlínug af hannum.
somebody was taken driver's license from him
His driver's license was taken from him yesterday.

30. Það var skoðað hérinn af bítverlurkið.
vað was examined by the mechanic
The car was checked by the mechanic.

31. Það var lenda þóð með þyris hónum.
vað was read-aloud the poem—ACC aloud for the children
The poem was read aloud to the children.

32. Mér lítur í slí.
vað DAT longs for ice cream
I want ice cream.

33. Það var skuldir borðið eftir því önnu og af.
vað was left behind the child—ACC behind at grandma and grandpa's
The child was left behind at grandma and grandpa's.

34. Það var framt hana til un.
vað was gone home to REFLEX
Person went to their home.
Elle thought we'd all want to go after dinner was ready.

After dinner I was asked to wash up.

After dinner I was asked to do the dishes.

I heard a noise at the front door. At least they added "noisy" to the DAD.

This morning somebody woke me up off my bike.

Hm-was very upset at foreground.

Mr DAD was asked up by the director:

He was fired by the director.

Had some food at the garden after school.

"DADDY," was waiting outside, waiting for the bus.

People waited impatiently for the bus.

I told her I'd like to have some food from the garden.

She was not amused at the meeting.

People didn't listen to each other at the meeting.

I told her she was wrong.

We played in the sleeping bag.

Last night we were摘要 in the sleeping bag.

She asked if we were摘要 in the sleeping bag.

People took a look around.

This morning we were out.

Garden was neat in the garden.

This morning was simple.

The boys have learned to stick together.

The boys have learned at home.

They have learned at home during the holidays.

Yesterday evening restart.

Yesterday evening restarted.

Yes, she left behind at home.

Yes, she left behind at home.

She was gone.

We went home late.

We heard crying.

People heard the crying.
48. He was told to pick up his bike. He was told not to tie it up.

I was told to clean up.

49. Someone pushed her bike. Someone pushed his own bike.

In the morning, she pushed her bike. Someone pushed his own bike.

50. He was told to sit down. He was told to sit down.

She was told to sit down. He was told to sit down.

51. The people went to the Christmas tree. The people went to the Christmas tree.

The people went around the Christmas tree.

52. The class was asked many questions. The class was asked many questions.

I was asked many questions in class.

53. Were you told to have any coffee? Were you told to have any coffee?

Were you told to have any coffee? Were you told to have any coffee?

54. People went home crying. People went home crying.

People went home crying. People went home crying.

55. Was the key taken from him? Was the key taken from him?

Was the key taken from him? Was the key taken from him?

56. He died in the bus accident. He died in the bus accident.

People died in the bus accident. People died in the bus accident.

57. It was agreed by all to go in bowling. It was agreed by everyone to go in bowling.

It was agreed by everyone to go in bowling. It was agreed by everyone to go in bowling.

58. She was left alone. She was left alone.

She was left behind alone at home. She was left behind alone at home.

59. She was told to come in the house. She was told to come in the house.

The girl was badly beaten up.

60. Her head is still肿.

Her head is still肿.
51. Deð var ett hålheti bröðrar sinn í sundhugnum. He was often dunked brother REFL in the swimming pool.
People often dunked their brother in the swimming pool.

52. Deð var bóði uppferð af stjórnveidum. He was offered-money offered-money for the birthday party.
Somebody paid for the birthday party all excited.

53. A kvöldin var skoður tilkynningin sinn. On the evening was checked name REFL.
The evening people checked their name.

54. Deð var dengt í biliðum fyrt frá den blikkin. He was frozen on the fire before from apartment building.
People fell on the fire in front of the apartment building.

55. Deð var talð lítt af rímmverum. He was spoken badly about the government knowing.
People spoke poorly of the government knowers.

56. Í gær var tækt lykten af bonum. Yesterday was taken the keys-ACC from man.
The keys were taken from man yesterday.

57. Deð var bóði mjög af vaka upp. He was asked much-ACC to wake up.
I was asked to wake up.

58. Sve var bara döði sig ein þá bail. So was just driven-money REFL off-money no dance.
So someone just hauled off to the dance alone.

References
Billings, Loren and Joan Maling. 1995, ‘Accusative-assigning Participial-into Constructions’