

CLAUSE-BOUNDED REFLEXIVES IN MODERN  
ICELANDIC\*

0. INTRODUCTION

By far the most striking aspect of reflexivization in modern Icelandic is that it is not clause-bounded (Thráinsson 1976a, Maling 1982, 1984). But the purpose of this paper is to show that even clause-bounded reflexivization is not nearly as simple as the description of Icelandic reflexives in the literature would indicate (see, e.g., Thráinsson 1979, Harbert 1981).<sup>1</sup> The distribution of reflexive pronouns within finite clauses shows clearly that any framework which does not recognize predication relationships cannot hope to account for the differences between various kinds of simplex sentences with respect to reflexivization. Furthermore, since there are phrasal complements which cannot plausibly be derived from full clauses but which nonetheless exhibit the same pattern of reflexives as infinitival complements, the reflexive facts alone cannot be taken to justify a clausal analysis of infinitives.

1. OBJECT-CONTROLLED REFLEXIVES

Icelandic makes productive use of four cases: nominative (N), accusative (A), dative (D) and genitive (G). This is illustrated in the paradigms for reflexive pronouns given below.

Reflexive Pronoun	Possessive Reflexive					
	singular			plural		
	m.	f.	n.	m.	f.	n.
N ...	sinn	sín	sitt	sínir	sínar	sín
A sig	sinn	sína	sitt	sína	sínar	sín
D sér	sínum	sinni	sínu	sínum	sínum	sínum
G sín	síns	sinnar	síns	sinna	sinna	sinna

There is a special reflexive pronoun only for the third person; the form varies for case, but not for number or gender. Note the morphological gap in the nominative case. However, the possessive reflexive **sinn** has a complete paradigm as shown in the table; it inflects for gender, number and case, including nominative forms. All reflexive pronouns will be glossed simply as REFL throughout this paper.

The basic facts about Icelandic reflexivization are described by Thráinsson (1976a,b) as follows: within simplex sentences, reflexivization is obligatory if the antecedent is a subject, and optional if the antecedent is an object. Thus one major difference between Icelandic and the other Scandinavian languages, e.g. Norwegian, is that Icelandic allows reflexives to have object antecedents as well as subject antecedents, and so, at least superficially, Icelandic appears to be more like English in this respect. This is illustrated by the following example, taken from Thráinsson (1979, p. 291):<sup>2</sup>

- (1) a. Jón<sub>i</sub> sýndi Haraldi<sub>j</sub> föt á  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{sig}_i \\ \text{sig}_j \\ *hann_i \\ \text{hann}_j \end{array} \right\}$ .

*John<sub>i</sub> showed Harold<sub>j</sub> clothes for himself<sub>i</sub>/himself<sub>j</sub>/\*him<sub>i</sub>/him<sub>j</sub>.*

- b. Jón<sub>j</sub> rétti Haraldi<sub>i</sub> fötin  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{sin}_i \\ \text{sin}_j \\ *hans_i \\ \text{hans}_j \end{array} \right\}$

*John<sub>j</sub> handed Harold<sub>i</sub> his clothes.*

These examples are intended to illustrate the fact that reflexivization from objects is optional, whereas reflexivization from a subject trigger is obligatory.<sup>3</sup>

Now let us look at some other types of simplex sentences. Consider the examples given in (2), where boldface is used to indicate intended coreference.<sup>4</sup>

- (2) a. Sálfræðingurinn gerði **Harald** [<sub>AP</sub> stoltan af **\*honum**  
*the psychiatrist made Harold (A) proud (A) of \*him*  
 sjálfum/sjálfum sér].  
 [self] /self REFL

The psychiatrist made Harold proud of himself.

- b. Ég taldi **Harald** [góðan við börnin **\*hans/sin**].  
*I considered Harald good with children \*his /REFL*  
 I considered Harold good with his children.

- c. Mér finnst **Haraldur** alltof hrifinn af **\*honum**  
*Me (D) finds Harold (N) [all too fond (N) of \*him*  
 sjálfum/sjálfum sér].  
 [self] /self REFL

I find Harold all too fond of himself.

The important fact to note is that in sentences of this type, even though the reflexive pronoun refers to the matrix object,<sup>5</sup> reflexivization is just as obligatory as it is with subject antecedents. How can we explain when object-controlled reflexivization is optional (as in (1)) and when it is obligatory (as in (2))? Clearly the difference is that the sentences in (2) contain what are traditionally called 'objective complements', i.e., predicative phrases controlled by (i.e. predicated of) the matrix object. The relationship between an objective complement and the matrix object is the same as that between an ordinary predicate complement and a subject. Both kinds of predicative phrases must agree in case with the NP they are predicated of. Thus in (2), the objective complements are accusative case just like the matrix object, whereas in (1) the case marking of the two verbal objects is independent, and in the given examples, is different. This suggests that we might try to account for the reflexivization facts by postulating syntactic subjects for the phrasal complements in (2).

There are two ways to provide syntactic subjects: either (i) we provide a clausal source with a PRO subject, or (ii) we make the matrix object the syntactic subject of a SMALL CLAUSE as suggested by Chomsky (1981). The small clause analysis assumes the counterintuitive constituency shown in (3):

- (3) Sálfraeðingurinn gerði [**Harald** stoltan af sjálfum sér].  
*the psychiatrist made Harold proud of himself*

It is obvious that the postulated small clause enclosed in brackets in no way behaves like a syntactic constituent: it cannot be moved by any transformation, nor can it be pronominalized. For example, the sentences in (4) show that the small clause cannot be topicalized as a unit, although its component parts can be. Since the finite verb (indicated in boldface) must be in second position in the clause in Icelandic, what precedes it must therefore be a single constituent.

- (4) a. \*Harald stoltan af sjálfum sér **gerði** sálfræðingurinn.  
 b. Harald **gerði** sálfræðingurinn stoltan af sjálfum sér.  
 c. Stoltan af sjálfum sér **gerði** sálfræðingurinn Harald.

Moreover, the small clause analysis cannot naturally be extended to subject-controlled complements (see section 2. below), and thus very different syntactic representations will be assigned. In addition, there are numerous arguments against small clauses within the Government/Binding framework (see Williams (1983)).

Now let us consider the alternative analysis, namely, a clausal source with a PRO subject: this analysis has generally been assumed for similar cases with infinitival complements (see e.g. Thráinsson (1979), Harbert (1981)). Although the phrasal complements in (2b,c) could plausibly be derived from a full clausal source with verb *vera* 'to be', the complement in (2a) cannot, since the presumed source is ungrammatical:

- (5) a. \*Sálfræðingurinn gerði Harald vera stoltan af sjálfum sér.  
*the psychiatrist made Harold to be proud of himself*
- b. Ég taldi Harald vera góðan við börnin sín.  
*I consider Harold to be good with children his*
- c. Mér finnst Haraldur vera alltof hrifinn af sjálfum sér.  
*I find Harold to be all too fond of himself*

Since a clausal source for objective complements is often syntactically unmotivated, it cannot be the right account of the obligatoriness of reflexivization. Hence these cases of apparent object antecedents provide support for theories which make use of predication relationships, such as the PREDICATE COMPLEX of Hellan (1982, forthcoming), or the CLAUSE NUCLEUS of Lexical-Functional Grammar, which has a functionally supplied subject to serve as antecedent. In such theoretical frameworks, a phrasal analysis of all predicate complements (including infinitivals) can capture the essential syntactic generalizations without requiring any but the most straightforward analysis of Icelandic phrase structure.

### 1.1. Three Classes of Simplex Sentences

If we look at simplex sentences with only one finite verb, we find that they fall into three distinct classes with respect to object-controlled reflexivization. In the first class, the reflexive pronoun is obligatory for all speakers; this class was illustrated in (2). These sentences contain two CLAUSE NUCLEI, and the reflexive in the object-controlled complement is obligatory. In the second class, which includes sentences like (1), we find that the reflexive pronoun is either optional or impossible depending on the speaker's dialect; the nonreflexive form is preferred. Some additional examples are given in (6). I have starred the reflexive forms to indicate the judgments of my informants; speakers who accept object-controlled reflexivization more freely would accept both forms.

- (6) **One clause nucleus<sup>6</sup>**
- a. Ég barði **Siggu** með dúkkunni **hennar**/\***sinni**.  
*I hit Sigga with doll her /\*REFL*  
 I hit Sigga with her doll.
- b. Við töluðum við **Jón** um vandamál **hans**/\***sín**.  
*we talked to John about problems his /\*REFL*  
 We talked to John about his problems.
- c. Ég skrifaði **Haraldi** um ritgerðina **hans**/\***sína**.  
*I wrote Harold about thesis his /\*REFL*  
 I wrote Harold about his thesis.

Finally, there is a third class where the complement is a locative or directional complement, predicated of the matrix object. A reflexive pronoun seems to be optional here for all speakers, even for those who do not otherwise accept object-controlled reflexivization. This may indicate that such complements allow two interpretations, only one of which involves predication.<sup>7</sup> The reflexive is strongly preferred over the nonreflexive.<sup>8</sup>

(7) **Locative or Directional Complements**

- a. Ég tók **kanínuna** úr búrinu ?**hennar/sínu**.  
*I took the rabbit out of cage its /REFL*
- b. Ég lagði **drenginn** við hlið systur **hans/sinnar**.  
*I put the boy by side [of]sister his /REFL*
- c. Ég lyfti **barninu** upp úr rúminu ?**þess/sínu**.  
*I lifted the child up out of bed its /REFL*

Finally, to further illustrate the difference between the various classes, consider a real minimal pair, as in (8), where the same verb is used in two different senses:

- (8) a. Við skiluðum **honum** peningunum **hans/?sínu**.  
*we returned him money his / REFL*  
We returned his money to him.
- b. Við skiluðum **honum** heim til ?**hans/sín**.  
*we returned him home to him /REFL*  
We returned him to his home.

(8a) is a simple ditransitive use of the verb *skila* ‘return’ taking two dative objects, and having but one clause nucleus, whereas (8b) could be analyzed as having two clause nuclei, with *heim til sín* being predicated of the object **honum**.<sup>9</sup> The nonreflexive pronoun is preferred in (8a), whereas in (8b) the reflexive pronoun is strongly preferred, and for some speakers who do not freely allow object antecedents, virtually obligatory. Yet here too the predicative object complement cannot plausibly be derived from a clausal source: not only would inserting *vera* ‘to be’ be ungrammatical, but the adverb *heim* would shift from directional to locative *heima*.

2. SUBJECT-CONTROLLED COMPLEMENTS

Most phrasal complements in Icelandic are object-controlled. However, I was able to find one case of a *sem*-phrase (*as*-complement) which is subject-controlled rather than object-controlled, parallel to the English *John strikes me as pompous*, as compared to the object-controlled *I regard John as pompous*. With respect to reflexivization, these subject-controlled

complements behave exactly like the subject-controlled infinitival complement to the verb *promise* (see (11a) below).

- (9) a. **Haraldur** kemur mér fyrir sjónir sem versti óvinur  
*Harold comes to me before the eyes as worst enemy*

**\*hans/sinn.**

*\*his /REFL*

Harold strikes me as his own worst enemy.

- b. Ég kem **Haraldi** fyrir sjónir sem versti óvinur  
*I come to Harold before the eyes as worst enemy*

**hans/\*sinn.**

*his /\*REFL*

I strike Harold as his worst enemy.

In sentences of this type with subject-controlled complements, we see that the matrix object may not be the antecedent of a reflexive in the complement, even optionally. A clausal source for the complement is even more implausible here than for many object-controlled cases; there is no verb which can be inserted.

The same kind of contrasts can be found with adjuncts, some of which are subject-controlled.

- (10) a. Vigdís heiðraði þá [sem forseti þeirra/\*sinn]  
*Vigdís honored them(A) as president(N) their /\*REFL*

Vigdís honored them as their president.

- b. Vigdís heiðraði hann [sem fulltrúa \*hennar/sinn].  
*Vigdís honored him(A) as representative(A) \*her /REFL*

Vigdís honored him as her representative.

The case-marking on the **sem**-phrase shows clearly which NP in the matrix it is predicated of: the subject in (10a), where the **sem**-phrase is nominative, and the object in (10b), where the **sem**-phrase is accusative. The consequences for reflexivization are predictable. The reflexive is impossible in (10a), even for speakers who freely accept object-controlled reflexives, because the intended antecedent is the matrix object, which is not the understood subject of the **sem**-phrase. In (10b), on the other hand, the reflexive is obligatory because the intended antecedent is the matrix subject.

In conclusion, there are many kinds of phrasal complements which cannot plausibly be derived from full clausal sources, but whose understood subjects are obligatory triggers for reflexivization. In order to describe the reflexive facts, we need to take predication relationships into

account because there is no syntactic subject at any level of representation to serve as antecedent.

### 3. THE CLAUSAL ANALYSIS OF INFINITIVES

Now let us turn to the analysis of infinitival complements. As in the other Scandinavian languages, but unlike English, Icelandic Reflexivization applies into infinitival complements from a matrix antecedent. What differences do we find between subject and nonsubject antecedents? The crucial examples from Thráinsson (1979, p. 293) are given below, where boldface is used instead of subscripts to indicate intended coreference:

- (11) a. Ég lofaði **Haraldi** að raka **hann**/\*sig.  
*I promised Harold to shave him* /\*REFL
- b. Ég skipaði **Haraldi** að raka **\*hann**/sig.  
*I ordered Harold to shave \*him* /REFL

It should be obvious that the relevant difference between (11a) and (11b) is that the understood subject of the infinitive is the matrix subject in (11a), but the matrix object in (11b). This lexical difference between the two verbs can be described by saying that **lofaði** 'promised' takes a subject-controlled infinitive, whereas **skipaði** 'ordered' takes an object-controlled infinitive. In order to account for the observed distribution of reflexives, we need to be able to refer to the subjects of the infinitives as obligatory controllers of Reflexivization. The question, of course, is whether the subjects are actually present in the syntax, as in a clausal analysis of the infinitive, or whether control can be stated in terms of semantic or functional subjects.

Such facts have been the basis of the traditional arguments for a clausal analysis of VP-infinitives, with either a PRO subject or some kind of subject-deletion under identity.<sup>10</sup> Thráinsson (1979) presents the classical transformational analysis. His major goal is to argue for a clausal analysis of infinitival complements and against the VP-analysis that would be required in any base-generated framework; in fact, he claims that a coherent account of reflexives can follow only from a clausal analysis of infinitives. He proposes the following generalizations:

- (12) a. Reflexivization is obligatory from a subject trigger within clauses and into infinitival clauses.
- b. Reflexivization from an object trigger is one notch weaker, i.e. optional within clauses, and impossible into infinitival complements.

In other words, assuming that infinitives are derived from clauses, object-

controlled reflexivization is clause-bounded, whereas subject-controlled reflexivization is not.

But the argument against a VP-analysis of infinitives in Icelandic depends crucially on the correctness of the constraints on object-controlled reflexivization as stated in (12b) — that is, on the assumption that it is always optional (i.e., always possible) within S, and that it is precisely S-boundaries and only S-boundaries which block reflexivization. But as we have just seen, both of these assumptions are false, at least given the usual conventions about phrase structure and constituency. The distribution of reflexive pronouns within finite clauses shows clearly that any framework which does not recognize predication relationships cannot hope to account for the differences between these various simplex sentences with respect to reflexivization.<sup>11</sup> Even when they cannot plausibly be derived from full clauses, predicative complements exhibit the same pattern with respect to reflexivization as do infinitival phrases. Examples like (2a, 9, 10) clearly undermine the argument against a VP-analysis of infinitives. Of course, the facts are also consistent with a clausal analysis of infinitives; they merely show that S-boundaries are not the only ones which block reflexivization. Thus one could decide to base-generate AP and PP predicate complements, and still derive VP (i.e., infinitival) complements from full Ss.<sup>12</sup> But the reflexivization facts alone do not justify such a move, since we find the same pattern of reflexive vs. nonreflexive pronouns for all categories of predicate complements; other arguments must be found to justify treating infinitives differently.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

There are two distinct cases of so-called 'clause-bounded' reflexivization in Icelandic. Since predicative complements of all types behave like infinitivals, we need to replace (12) with (13):

- (13) a. Reflexivization is obligatory from a subject trigger within the finite clause (and into predicative complements of all types).  
 b. Reflexivization is optional from an object trigger within the minimal unit of predication (and impossible into predicative complements not predicated of that object).

Let us describe with the feature [+nuclear] any (bound) anaphor whose domain is the minimal unit of predication, i.e., an anaphor which must find its antecedent in the same nucleus of predication in which it occurs. Then we can make the stipulations in (13) by saying that object-controlled **sig** is [+nuclear] but that subject-controlled **sig** is not so restricted. This difference in anaphoric domain is illustrated in (14).



- (14) a. Ég lofaði **Haraldi** að raka **hann/\*sig**.  
*I promised Harold to shave him /\*REFL*
- b. **Haraldur** skipaði mér að raka **\*hann/sig**.  
*Harold ordered me to shave \*him /REFL*

The infinitival complement in (14a) is subject-controlled; hence the matrix object is not a possible antecedent for an anaphor in the infinitive phrase because it lies outside the minimal clause nucleus. However, a matrix *subject* is a possible antecedent for an anaphor in an infinitival complement, even when the infinitive is object-controlled as in (14b). Thus a reflexive pronoun inside a predicate complement is potentially ambiguous, since its antecedent may be either the understood subject of the complement or the matrix subject. This is illustrated for infinitival complements in (15), and for AP-complements in (16).<sup>13</sup>

- (15) Hann skipaði Haraldí að raka sig.  
*He<sub>i</sub> ordered Harold<sub>j</sub> to shave himself<sub>i,j</sub>*
- (16) Siggú finnst Haraldur hrifinn af sér.  
*Sigga<sub>i</sub>(D) finds Harold<sub>j</sub>(N) fond(N) of self<sub>i,j</sub>*

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> The standard description suggests that Icelandic differs in significant ways from the other Scandinavian languages, e.g. Norwegian as described by Lars Hellan (1982, forthcoming). Since Norwegian and Icelandic are so closely related, this would be rather surprising: in fact, however, as I will show here, the two languages differ only minimally in the distribution of reflexive pronouns within the finite clause.

<sup>2</sup> The grammaticality judgments are Thráinsson's. However, many speakers do not accept object-controlled reflexives as readily, and find these examples ungrammatical if the intended antecedent of **sig** is **Haraldi**. Einarsson (1945) notes that the reflexive possessive only allows subject antecedents, but this is clearly not the case for Thráinsson.

Object-controlled reflexives appear to have been more common in Old Icelandic than they are today (Jón Friðjónsson (personal communication); see also Juntune (1978, pp. 419–20 and note 2); Nygaard (1966, pp. 338–9)).

<sup>3</sup> Note that the optionality of object-controlled reflexivization means that for such speakers, pronouns and bound anaphors are not in complementary distribution in Icelandic, as they are in English.

<sup>4</sup> Like all other studies of Icelandic reflexives, this one is an oversimplification in the sense that the occurrence of **sjálfur** 'self' is ignored, even when it seems to be almost obligatory. To my knowledge, the conditions on the use(s) of **sjálfur** have never been worked out. My impression is that it is much less syntactically governed than the corresponding Norwegian

**selv** (see Hellan (1982, forthcoming) for a description), but in at least some contexts it is more than simply an emphatic option. See note 13.

<sup>5</sup> Note that in (2c) **Haraldur** is the matrix object despite its nominative case-marking, and the dative **mér** is the matrix subject. See Thráinsson (1979) for discussion.

<sup>6</sup> The following sentence, although it seems to be a simple ditransitive verb with a single clause nucleus, was accepted with a reflexive pronoun as well as the nonreflexive by informants who do not in general accept object-controlled reflexives, although the non-reflexive was preferred.

- (i) Ég sendi **Haraldi** föt á **hann**/(?)**sig**.  
*I sent Harold clothes for him /(?REFL)*

As Anderson (this volume) notes, the reciprocal anaphor **hvör annar** 'each other' is also allowed in this position; unlike reflexives, reciprocals are clause-bounded ([+nuclear]) in Icelandic. Hellan (1982) notes a similar idiosyncratic counterexample in Norwegian. On the other hand, if the first (indirect) object is a pronoun, the judgments are reversed:

- (ii) Ég sendi **honum** föt á (?)**hann**/**sig**.  
*I sent him clothes for ?him /REFL*

So the problem may well lie with some ill-understood redundancy effect which needs to be investigated further.

<sup>7</sup> The same class of complements presents complications for the description of reflexives in many languages, including English (cf. Chomsky (1981, 290ff.) and Russian (cf. Timberlake (1980)).

<sup>8</sup> Jón Friðjónsson (personal communication) suggests that the nonreflexive is the innovative form in these contexts.

<sup>9</sup> The notion of predication needed for locatives and directionals is not as crystal-clear as one would like, as shown by the fact that reflexivization is at most optional in such cases, and the fact that not all speakers of Icelandic get the contrast illustrated in (8). Interestingly enough, as pointed out to me by Jane Simpson, Timberlake (1980) noted the same contrast for Russian reflexives, although he had no explanation for it.

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. Harbert (1981) and Anderson (this volume) as well as Thráinsson (1979), all of whom repeat the traditional argument in discussing Icelandic reflexives.

<sup>11</sup> Note that a (base-generated) Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar analysis will run into exactly the same problem as the standard theory account, unless grammatical functions are somehow introduced by means of syntactic features which can be used to distinguish between XPs which are of the same syntactic category but have different grammatical functions.

<sup>12</sup> As suggested, for example, by Edwin Williams (1983).

<sup>13</sup> **Sjálfur** 'self' is often used to disambiguate the reflexive pronoun in favor of the [+nuclear] subject. This is true for finite as well as nonfinite complements; remember that reflexivization can cross finite clause boundaries in Icelandic (see Thráinsson (1976a), Maling (1984)):

- (i) **Siggu** finnst að **Haraldur** sé hrifinn af **sér**.  
*Sigga finds that Harold is fond of REFL*  
 Sigga thinks that Harold is fond of her.
- (ii) Öllum finnst að **Haraldur** sé hrifinn af sjálfum **sér**.  
*All find that Harold is fond of self REFL*  
 Everybody thinks that Harold is fond of himself.

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