





## 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 *-no/to* construction in Polish and the autonomous form in Irish.

### 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’ (Kjartansson 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 subjecthood of these NPs is not obvious from the word order; for detailed argumentation, see Zaenen, Maling and Thráinsson (1985), Sigurðsson (1989/1992). As illustrated in (1c), an agentive 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. **Stúlkan** var lamið í klessu.  
*the.girl-NOM was hit-f.sg.NOM in a.mess*  
 The girl was badly beaten. Nominative Passive
- b. i. **Henni** var hrint í skólanum.  
*she-DAT was pushed-neut.sg in the.school*  
 She was pushed at school. Oblique Passive
- ii. **Kennarans** var saknað.  
*the.teacher-GEN was missed-neut.sg*
- c. **Það** var dansað í kringum jólatréð.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was danced-neut.sg around the.Christmas.tree*  
 People danced 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 ungrammatical 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 lamið **stúlkuna** í klessu.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was hit-neut.sg. the.girl-f.sg.ACC in a.mess*  
 The girl was badly beaten. 'New Passive/Impersonal'

- b. Það var hrint **henni** í skólanum.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was pushed her-DAT in the.school*  
 She was pushed at school.
- c. Það var saknað **kennarans**.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> 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 (1a); 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. Það voru seldir **margir bílar** í gær.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> were sold-m.pl. many cars-m.pl.NOM yesterday*  
 Many cars were sold yesterday. Passive voice
- b.\* Það voru seldir **bílar** í gær.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> were sold-m.pl. the.cars-m.pl.NOM yesterday*  
 Intended: 'There were the cars sold yesterday.'
- c.\* Það voru **bílar** seldir í gær.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> were the.cars-m.pl.NOM sold-m.pl. yesterday*
- (4) a. Það hafa loksins flutt **strákar** inn í húsið.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> have finally moved boys-NOM into in the.building*  
 Some boys have finally moved into the building. Active voice
- b.\* Það hafa loksins flutt **strákarnir** inn í húsið.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> have finally moved the.boys-NOM into in the.building*

- c.\* Það hafa **strákarnir** loksins flutt inn í húsið.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> have the.boys-NOM finally moved 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 Safir 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:**
- Accusative rather than nominative case on the underlying object
  - Lack of NP-movement to subject position
  - 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 *það* 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. | $[_{IP} e [_1 \text{Tns, Agr, Pass}] [_{VP} V \text{ NP}]]$      | Canonical Passive<br>w/o NP-movement |
| b. | $[_{IP} \textit{pro} [_1 \text{Tns, Agr}] [_{VP} V \text{ NP}]]$ | 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 *það* will be inserted at S-structure as needed to satisfy the Verb-Second Constraint; this pleonastic *það* is nonreferential and does not bear a theta role.

Sobin (1985) proposes an analysis of the first type for the Ukrainian *-no/to* construction; Maling (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 Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (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 morphology 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 Maling (1993), the Irish autonomous form and the Polish *-no/to* 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-

agreeing verb (cf. Stenson 1989 for Irish; Dziwirek 1991, Lavine 2000, and various references cited in Billings and Maling 1995 for Polish).

(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 construction.

On the other hand, the accusative-case assigning *-no/to* 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 *-no/to* constructions illustrated below.<sup>1</sup> In (8) through (10), we illustrate for Polish the syntactic properties listed in (7). The canonical passive illustrated in (8a) coexists with the participial *-no/to* construction illustrated in (8b).

(8) **Two so-called passive constructions in Polish**

- a. Świątynia była zbudowana w 1640 roku.  
church-NOM was built-f.sg. in 1640 year  
Canonical passive
- b. Świątynię 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 participial *-no/to* 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

<sup>1</sup> The forms *-n-* and *-r-* in Polish and Ukrainian are allomorphs of the past passive morpheme; the *-o*, once the neut.sg. inflection, is now invariant. 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 Lavine (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 obrabowany przez nich.  
*John-NOM was robbed-3msg by them*  
 Agentive *by*-phrase
- b. \*Swoja własna ojczyzna           była chwalona.  
*REFL own fatherland-NOM was praised-f.sg.*  
 Bound anaphors
- c. Jan           był obrabowany po pijanemu.  
*John-NOM was robbed-3msg while drunk*  
 John was robbed while drunk. [John was drunk]  
 Subject Control
- d. i. \*Ważędzie było tańczone.  
*everywhere was-neut.sg danced-neut.sg*  
 Intended: There was dancing everywhere.  
 Unergative
- ii. \*Dawniej było umeriane młodo.  
*before was-neut.sg died-neut.sg. young*  
 Intended: In the old days, people died young.  
 Unaccusative

As illustrated in (10), the *-no/to* construction differs in each of these four syntactic properties, exactly as expected if it has a fully thematic subject.<sup>2</sup> For these reasons, we have glossed the *-no/to* 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

<sup>2</sup> Lavine (2000, p. 118ff) provides further grammatical contrasts between canonical verbal passives and the *-no/to* construction in Polish based on psych-predicates.



can occur in this construction, not only agentives but also unaccusatives. Note that the contrast between (9dii) and (10dii) would be unexplained if both constructions were analyzed as passives.

(10) **Properties of the -no/to passive in Polish**

- a. Jana obrabowano (\*przez nich) Agentive *by*-phrase  
*John-ACC robbed-IMP (\*by them)*  
 They robbed John (\*by them).
- b. i. Zamknięto się w fabryce. Bound anaphors  
*locked-IMP REFL in factory*  
 They locked themselves in the factory.
- ii. Chwalono swoją własną ojczyznę.  
*praised-IMP REFL own fatherland-f.sg.ACC*  
 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 wazędzie. Unergative intransitive  
*danced-IMP everywhere*  
 There was dancing everywhere.
- ii. Dawniej umeriano młodo. Unaccusative intransitive  
*before died-IMP young*  
 In the old days, people died at a young age.

The *-no/to* morphology, originally a passive participle, can now attach to unaccusative verbs, including the copula and raising verbs, as shown in (11):

(11) **-no/to with unaccusative verbs in Polish**

- a. Zdawano się nas nie zauważać.  
*seem-IMP REFL 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 *-no/to* construction does not observe the 1-Advancement Exclusiveness Law (1AEX) 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 *-no/to* 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 1995; Lavine 2000, 2001); hence, we gloss the cognate *-no/to* 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 *-no/to* construction**

a. Mojim mylym mene zradženo.

*my-INST beloved-INST me-ACC betrayed-PASS*

(Shevelov 1963, p. 144) Agentive *by*-phrase

I was betrayed by my beloved.

b.\*Svoju žinku bulo obmaneno.

*self's wife-ACC was deceived-PASS*

(Lavine 2000, p. 144, ex. (61a)) Bound Anaphors

Intended: Someone deceived his wife.

c.\*Povernuvšys' dodomu, hroši bulo znajдено.

*returning home money was found-PASS*

(Lavine 2000, p. 90, ex. (5b)) Subject Control

Intended: Having returned home, the money was found.

d.\*Umerto/\*Zaxvorito/\*Priixato.

Unaccusative intransitives

*died-PASS/got.sick-PASS/arrived-PASS*

These properties follow automatically from the assumption that the Ukrainian *-no/to* 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.<sup>3</sup>

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 *-no/to* 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 *-no/to* is a “new, unanalyzable morpheme with the dedicated function and distribution of an auxiliary” (Lavine 2000, p. 140). 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 (13a) 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. . . . maje buty pokazano nyzku. Ukrainian  
           will be-*INF* shown-*PASS* series-*ACC*  
           . . . a series will be shown
- b. \*Serie ma być pokazano. Polish  
           series-*ACC* will be-*INF* shown-*IMP*

Lavine points to another difference with respect to control of the PRO subject of infinitivals. Only the Polish *-no/to* 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 begun-*IMP* build-*INF* house-*ACC*  
           They began to build a house on the hill.
- b. \*U misti počato [PRO budovaty novu cerkvu]  
           in city begun-*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

<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps worth noting that Ukrainian may be developing an overt expletive subject, *vono*, 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 expletive status dubious and argues that in the cited examples, *vono* is best analyzed as a fully referential neuter singular pronoun.

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 Bernóðsson (1982, p. 212), who cited three examples with 1st person sg. pronoun objects, accusative *mig* and dative *mér*. Hálfðanarson (1984, p. 31) provides the example in (15) as an example of a "language error," a usage to be corrected.

- |      |  |  |
|------|--|--|
| (15) | Language Error #174:<br><i>Heyrst hefur: Það var<br/>sagt honum að fara.<br/>RÉTT VÆRI: Honum<br/>var sagt að fara.<br/>Leiðréttum þetta<br/>hjá börnum.</i> | (Helgi Hálfðanarson 1984, p. 31)<br><i>Heard: it<sub>EXPL</sub> was<br/>told him to leave.<br/>CORRECT: He<br/>was told to leave.<br/>Let's correct this in children's<br/>speech.</i> |
|------|--|--|

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 (*þágufallssýki*), which began around the turn of the century (Svavarsdóttir 1982).<sup>4</sup> Sigurðsson (1989, p. 355) gives an example of the new construction containing a 3rd person pronominal object and notes (fn. 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

<sup>4</sup> We included one such sentence on our questionnaire: *Mér langar í ís* 'me-DAT longs for ice-cream'. The acceptance rates for this sentence were 32% (Elsewhere), 16% (Inner Reykjavík) 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.

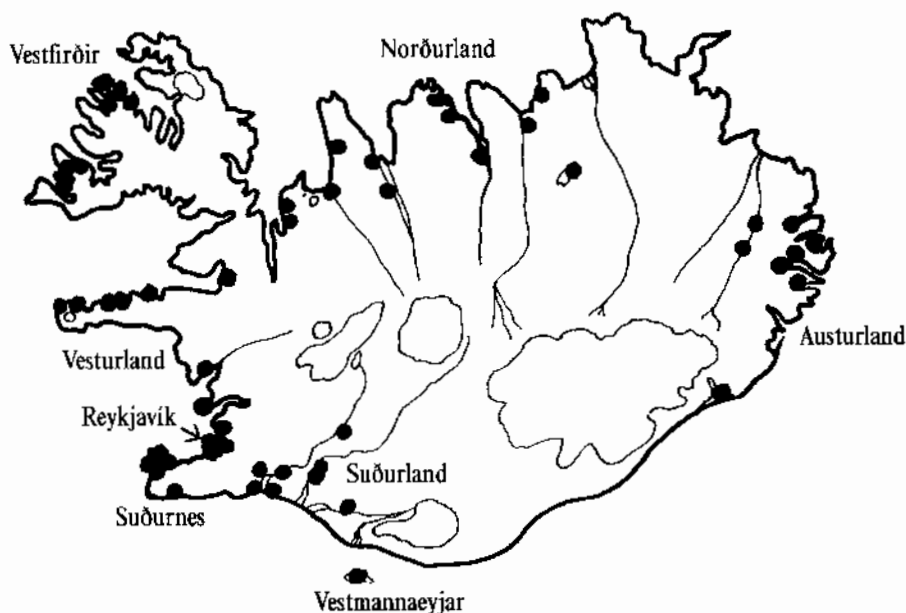


Figure 1. Map of Iceland.

After excluding subjects who made more than one error on the ungrammatical control sentences, we have results from 1695 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.

(17) **Number of subjects in each geographical region of Iceland**

Geographical area	Adolescents	Adults
Vesturland	181	34
Vestfirðir	95	24
Norðurland	262	27
Austurland	146	21
Vestmannaeyjar	72	16
Suðurland	218	19
Suðurnes	138	20
Outer Reykjavík	363	39
Inner Reykjavík	220	
Total	1,695	200

The population of Iceland is approximately 286,000; the population of Greater Reykjavík 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 Reykjavík into Inner and Outer Reykjavík to make this difference even clearer. Inner Reykjavík is the area west of the river Elliðaá and north of Fossvogur; 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).



Figure 2. Map of Reykjavík.

(18) **Geographical variation in acceptance of “new impersonal” with animate objects**

Geographical area	Accusative Objects		Dative Objects	
	Adolescents	Adults	Adolescents	Adults
Vesturland	68%	3%	73%	6%
Vestfirðir	63%	3%	68%	7%
Norðurland	55%	3%	60%	7%
Austurland	51%	4%	58%	6%
Vestmannaeyjar	65%	5%	71%	4%
Suðurland	60%	1%	68%	9%
Suðurnes	69%	7%	75%	3%
Outer Reykjavík	53%	1%	60%	3%
Inner Reykjavík	28%		35%	

Our results reveal a statistically significant relationship between geographical region and the acceptability judgments. There was a clear difference between Reykjavík and the rest of the country; the difference was even more striking once we divided Reykjavík into the two parts which we have called Inner and Outer Reykjavík. Subjects in Outer Reykjavík were nearly twice as likely to accept such examples of the "new impersonal" as subjects in Inner Reykjavík, and moreover this effect is highly significant. For sentences with accusative animate objects (9 sentences), the difference between Inner ( $M = 0.28$ ,  $SD = 0.27$ ) and Outer ( $M = 0.52$ ,  $SD = 0.32$ ) was highly significant,  $t(520.641) = 9.636$ ,  $p = 0.000$  (2-tailed). For sentences with dative animate objects (3 sentences), the difference between Inner ( $M = 0.35$ ,  $SD = 0.34$ ) and Outer ( $M = 0.60$ ,  $SD = 0.37$ ) was highly significant,  $t(581) = 8.119$ ,  $p = 0.000$  (2-tailed).<sup>5</sup>

However, the difference between Outer Reykjavík and the rest of the country, excluding Inner Reykjavík, was not significant. For sentences with accusative animate objects, the difference between Outer Reykjavík ( $M = 0.52$ ,  $SD = 0.32$ ) and the rest of the country ( $M = 0.51$ ,  $SD = 0.35$ ) was not significant,  $t(616.842) = -0.394$ ,  $p = 0.694$  (2-tailed); for sentences with dative animate objects, the difference between Outer Reykjavík ( $M = 0.60$ ,  $SD = 0.37$ ) and the rest of the country ( $M = 0.57$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ) was not significant,  $t(607.914) = -1.018$ ,  $p = 0.309$  (2-tailed). This result justifies our combining Outer Reykjavík 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 Reykjavík. 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 Reykjavík, 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, Kjartansson (1991, p. 18) speculated that the new construction was more

<sup>5</sup> 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 ( $M = 0.54$ ,  $SD = 0.33$ ) and dative ( $M = 0.61$ ,  $SD = 0.37$ ) was highly significant,  $t(1691) = -10.928$ ,  $p = 0.000$  (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 nonagreement 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 infinitival complement**

ACC vs DAT on indirect object	Elsewhere	Inner Rvík	Adults
a. Það var beðið mig að vaska upp. <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was asked me-ACC to wash up</i> I was asked to do the dishes.	74%	47%	8%
b. Það var sagt mér að taka til. <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was told me-DAT to clean up</i> I was told to clean up.	62%	34%	3%

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].<sup>6</sup> One might speculate that the higher acceptability of dative

<sup>6</sup> It is interesting that animacy affects the choice between the *bli*-passive and the *s*-passive in Swedish. If the affected argument is human, either passive may be used; if the patient is inanimate, the *s*-passive is either more likely or the only possible choice, as illustrated by the contrast in (ia, b) from Engdahl (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 Maling to appear). This is illustrated by the following examples taken from Barðdal (1993, p. 4, ex. (6a, b)).

- (20) a. Kristín þvoði handklæðið.  
Christine washed the.towel-ACC
- b. Kristín þvoði barninu.  
Christine 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**

	Elsewhere		Inner Reykjavík	
	Anim	Inanim	Anim	Inanim
ACC	75%	55%	43%	19%
DAT	74%	51%	43%	20%

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 since 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.

- (i) a. Det dracks mycket öl den kvällen. s-passive  
A lot of beer was drunk that evening.
- b. \*Det blev drucket mycket öl den kvällen. bli-passive  
it<sub>EXPL</sub> was drunk much beer that evening

4.2. *Reliability of judgments*

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 Reykjavík. 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**

Two control sentences	Elsewhere	Inner Rvík	Adults
a. Ólafur var rekinn úr skólanum. <i>Olaf-NOM was driven from the.school</i> Olaf was expelled from school.	99%	96%	99%
b. *Haraldur er ennþá veikt. <i>Harald-masc is still sick-neut</i>	6%	6%	1%

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 neuter form of the adjective fails to agree with the masculine subject.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> 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: *Í dag kennarinn er lasinn* '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 Pouplier (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 accusative animate objects as a function of mother's education,<sup>8</sup> where 1 = compulsory education (10th grade), 2 = 14 years of schooling (*menntaskóli*, Gymnasium), and 3 = university level.

(23) **Acceptance of "new impersonal" as a function of mother's education**

1 = compulsory education (10th grade), 2 = 14 years of schooling (*menntaskóli*), and 3 = university level.

Geographical region	Mother's education	Acceptance rate	Geographical region	Mother's education	Acceptance rate
Vesturland	1	71%	Suðurland	1	62%
	2	66%		2	57%
	3	57%		3	44%
Vestfirðir	1	67%	Suðurnes	1	73%
	2	56%		2	64%
	3	50%		3	63%
Norðurland	1	58%	Outer Reykjavík	1	60%
	2	56%		2	50%
	3	42%		3	41%
Austurland	1	53%	Inner Reykjavík	1	33%
	2	47%		2	31%
	3	41%		3	23%
Vestmannaeyjar	1	62%			
	2	69%			
	3	56%			

<sup>8</sup> Since not all subjects provided information about their parents' education, these results are based on 1547 subjects and not 1695.

This is similar to the results among 11-year old children reported by Svavarsdóttir (1982) in her study of dative-sickness. Recall that adolescents in Inner Reykjavík were only half as likely to accept the new construction as adolescents in the rest of the country, as reported in the table in (18). We suspect that this reflects a sociological factor rather than a strictly geographic factor. Data from 1999 indicate that the populace of Inner Reykjavík has the highest percentages of university education in the country (Morgunblaðið, 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 (7). 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<sup>9</sup> or in declaratives.

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

Accusative in subject position in direct questions	Else-where	Inner Rvík	Adults
a. Var <b>stúlkuna</b> lamið í klessu? <i>was the.girl-ACC beaten in a.mess</i>	7%	3%	5%
b. Var <b>lyklana</b> tekið af honum? <i>was the.keys-ACC taken from him</i>	4%	3%	1%
c. Var <b>hana</b> skilið eftir heima? <i>was she-ACC left behind at.home</i>	8%	5%	1%
d. Var <b>þig</b> spurt margra spurninga? <i>was you-ACC asked many questions</i>	26%	18%	2%

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

Accusative in subject position in declaratives	Else-where	Inner Rvík	Adults
a. Í gær var <b>Harald</b> sótt seint í skólann. <i>yesterday was Harold sought late at school</i> Yesterday Harold was picked up late from school.	6%	5%	2%
b. Eftir matinn var <b>mig</b> beðið að vaska upp. <i>after the.meal was me asked to wash up</i> After dinner I was asked to do the dishes.	9%	5%	1%

<sup>9</sup> We have no explanation for the unexpectedly high acceptability of (24d). Possible factors that need to be investigated include the polyadicity of the verb and whether the pronoun 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" (Guðmundsdóttir 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**

Definite Nominative NP in object position	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults
* <i>Það</i> hefur komið <b>Ólafur</b> of seint í <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> has come Olaf too late in</i> skólann í marga daga <i>school in many days</i> Olaf has come to school too late for many days.	2%	3%	2%

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 *það* 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

Agentive <i>by</i> -phrase in grammatical control sentences	Else-where	Inner Rvík	Adults
a. Honum var sagt upp af forstjóranum. <i>he-DAT was fired PRT by the.director</i>	87%	93%	90%
b. Það var samþykkt af öllum í <i>it was agreed by all in</i> bekknum að fara í keilu. <i>the.class to go bowling</i>	95%	92%	94%

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 *-no/to* 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

Agentive <i>by</i> -phrase	Else-where	Inner Rvík	Adults
a. Það var skoðað <b>bílinn</b> af bifvélavirkjanum. <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was inspected the.car by the.mechanic</i>	33%	9%	1%
b. Það var sagt <b>honum</b> upp af forstjóranum. <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was fired him PRT by the.director</i>	19%	9%	0%

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.<sup>10</sup>

(29) **Minimal Pair**

Agentive <i>by</i> -phrase	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults
a. <b>Honum</b> var sagt upp af forstjóranum. <i>he-DAT was fired PRT by the.director</i>	87%	93%	90%
b. Það var sagt <b>honum</b> upp af forstjóranum. <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was fired him PRT by the.director</i>	19%	9%	0%
c. Það var sagt <b>öllum krökkunum</b> að fara heim. <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was told all the.kids to go home</i>	74%	43%	4%

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

<sup>10</sup> As pointed out to us by Höskuldur Thráinsson, it is not generally possible to have an overt *by*-phrase with definite agent in ordinary passive voice *það*-sentences, as illustrated in (ia, b):

- (i) a. Það voru skoðaðir nokkrir bílar (\*af bifvélavirkjanum).  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> were inspected some cars-NOM by the.mechanic*  
b. Það var sagt upp mörgu fólki (\*af forstjóranum).  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was fired PRT many people-DAT (by the.director)*

Although the new construction resembles passives like those in (i), the crucial difference is that the postverbal NP in the new construction is definite rather than indefinite. Recall that the new construction is typically 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 (ii), where the unnamed agent is most likely a specific individual:

- (ii) Það var sagt mér að fara heim.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was told me to go home*

For these reasons, we think that the test sentences in (28) bear on the hypothesis being tested.

*sjálfan sig*, five with a possessive reflexive, and two with a reciprocal. 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.<sup>11</sup>

(30) **Binding of *sig*-anaphors**

<i>sig</i> -anaphor	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults
a. Svo var bara drifið <i>sig</i> á ball. <i>then was just hurried REFL to the dance</i>	78%	67%	40%
b. Það var haldið <i>sig</i> innan dyra <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was kept REFL in doors</i> út af óveðrinu. <i>due to bad.weather</i>	82%	65%	37%
c. Það var skoðað <i>sig</i> um á svæðinu. <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was looked REFL around in the.area</i> People looked around the area.	72%	43%	31%
d. Það var farið heim til <i>sín</i> . <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was gone home to REFL</i> People went home.	59%	56%	39%

This confirms Sigurðsson's speculation (1989/1992, p. 235) that the new construction is best with reflexive verbs.<sup>12</sup> This result is not surprising

<sup>11</sup> Statistical analysis shows that a given speaker tends to either accept all of the example sentences in (30) or reject them all. If an adolescent accepts one of these sentences, then he/she is likely to accept the others. If an adult speaker rejects one of the sentences, then he/she is likely to reject 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 *leika sér* 'play' with verbs like *raka* 'shave' and *baða* 'bathe', which optionally take reflexive objects.

<sup>12</sup> Sigurðsson (1989, p. 355, fn. 60) gives the following two examples:

- (i) a. ? Það var leikið sér allan daginn.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was played REFL all day*  
b. ?? Það var baðað *sig* á laugardaginn.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was bathed REFL on Saturday*

The judgments indicated are Sigurðsson's; note that in a pilot study in Hvassaleitisskóli in Inner Reykjavík, only 1 out of 24 subjects judged (ia) ungrammatical (cf. Björnsdóttir 1997).

since in many languages, verbs with reflexive objects behave syntactically like intransitive verbs (Sells, Zaenen and Zec 1987). Recall that, as reported in the table in (18), only 28% of adolescents in Inner Reykjavík accepted comparable sentences with nonreflexive accusative objects; in other words, subjects in Inner Reykjavík 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 *sig* than 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**

Self-anaphor	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults
a. Það var horft á sjálfan sig í speglinum. <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was looked at SELF in the.mirror</i>	58%	48%	34%
b. Það var bent á sjálfan sig á myndinni. <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was pointed to SELF in the.picture</i>	19%	11%	13%

(32) **Binding of reciprocals**

Reciprocals	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults
a. Það var ekki hlustað á hvern annan <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was not listened to each other</i> á fundinum. <i>at the.meeting</i>	37%	25%	13%
b. Það var hjálpað hverjum öðrum <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was helped each other</i> með verkefnið. <i>with the.assignment</i>	14%	8%	1%

## (33) Binding of possessive reflexives

Possessive Reflexive <i>sinn</i>	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults
a. Það var haldið með sínu liði. <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was held with SELF's team</i> People supported their (own) team.	63%	49%	36%
b. Á kvöldin var skoðað tölvupóstinn <i>in the.evening was checked e-mail</i> <i>sinn.</i> <i>SELF's</i>	32%	10%	2%
c. Í morgun var hrint systur sinni <i>this morning was pushed sister SELF's</i> af hjólinu. <i>off the.bike</i>	13%	7%	2%
d. Það var klippt hárið á dúkkunni sinni. <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was cut the.hair on doll SELF's</i>	5%	2%	2%
e. Það var oft kaffært bróður sinn <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was often dunked brother SELF</i> í sundlauginni. <i>in the.pool</i>	5%	3%	1%

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 acceptance rates for this sentence are much lower than for (33a).<sup>13</sup> 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 kinds of agent-oriented adjuncts including purpose phrases, as illustrated in (34).

- (34) a. Snjónum var mokað vandlega yfir hræið.  
*the.snow was shoveled carefully over the.carcass*
- b. Mottan var barin af kappi.  
*the.rug was beaten with zeal*
- c. Bátnum var hvolft viljandi.  
*the.boat was capsized on.purpose*  
 (Zaenen 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 hágrátandi.  
*the.dog was beaten crying*
- b.?? Valsinn var dansaður skellihlæjandi.  
*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 *gráta* ‘to cry’; in (35b) the grammatical subject is an inanimate noun, *vals* ‘waltz’, which is not a suitable controller for the verb *hlæja* ‘to laugh’; hence the sentences are

<sup>13</sup> The data might be interpreted as evidence of a multiplier effect. The average acceptance rate for examples of the new construction with accusative objects was about 60% for adolescents outside of Inner Reykjavík, i.e. Elsewhere; this multiplied by the 63% acceptance rate for (33a) yields 38%, which is not unlike the actual 32% rate. The same is true for Inner Reykjavík, where 28% of the adolescents accepted the new construction with accusative objects. Multiplying this by the 49% acceptance rate for (33a) yields 13%, which is close to the observed 10%.

judged ungrammatical.<sup>14</sup> 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) Það var dansað skellihljæjandi á skipinu.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was danced laughing uproariously 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 *skellihljæjandi*. This was expressed by the intuition of one native speaker that “someone is missing.” 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 Reykjavík, 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 Reykjavík where the innovative construction is less widespread, and by adults.

(37) **Subject-oriented Participial Adjuncts**

Participial Adjuncts	Else- where	Inner Rvfk	Adults
a. Það var komið skellihljæjandi í tímann. <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was come laughing into class</i>	68%	47%	52%
b. Það var farið hágrátandi heim. <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was gone crying home</i>	61%	50%	49%
c. Það var lesið minningargreinina grátandi. <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was read the.memorial.article crying</i>	62%	35%	4%

<sup>14</sup> Höskuldur Thráinsson (p.c.) points out that such sentences can be improved given suitable context.

- (i) Eftir að hljómsveitarstjórnin hafði sagt þennan brandara voru síðustu  
*after the.bandleader had told that joke were last*  
 dansarnir dansaðir skellihljæjandi.  
*dances danced laughing uproariously*

What is surprising is that approximately 50% of adults also accepted sentences like (37a, b). Barðdal 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 are accepted, the more simple reflexives are accepted.<sup>15</sup> Although it is certainly possible to allow statements in the grammar to the effect 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: (i) agentive verbs and (ii) most psych verbs with nominative subjects. One obvious consequence is that unaccusative verbs do not form passives (see Perlmutter 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 morpheme in I, 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 [+human].

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

<sup>15</sup> For adolescents, the correlation was very significant ( $r = 0.433$ ,  $n = 1693$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , 2-tailed); for adults, the correlation was also very significant ( $r = 0.532$ ,  $n = 199$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , 2-tailed).

with nonagent subjects: *detta* ‘to fall’,<sup>16</sup> *koma* ‘to arrive’, *svitna* ‘to sweat’, *hverfa* ‘to disappear’ and *deyja* ‘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 *detta* ‘to fall’ to a low of 14% for *deyja* ‘to die’<sup>17</sup> for adolescents outside of Inner Reykjavík.

## (38) Unaccusative verbs

Unaccusative verbs	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults
a. Það var dottið í hálkunni fyrir <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was fallen on the.ice in front</i> framan blokkina. <i>of the.apartment building</i>	55%	45%	25%
b. Í morgun var komið of seint í skólann. <i>this morning was arrived too late to school</i>	36%	38%	58%
c. Í nótt var ekkert svitnað í <i>last night was not.at.all sweated in</i> svefnpokanum. <i>the.sleeping.bag</i>	31%	29%	31%
d. Það var horfið sporlaust í <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was disappeared traceless in</i> stjörnustríðinu. <i>the.star.wars</i>	30%	23%	22%
e. Það var dáíð í bílslysínu. <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was died in the.car.accident</i>	14%	11%	2%

<sup>16</sup> Barðdal and Molnár (2000, p. 129) argue that (37a) is possible because speakers interpret it as an agentive and actional verb, i.e., as an unergative. While this is a plausible account for some examples (see fn.14 below), it is dubious for this example since the verb *detta* ‘to fall’ cannot be used to describe intentional falling in Icelandic, and the semantics of the given example (slipping on ice) makes an agentive reading implausible.

<sup>17</sup> As has frequently been pointed out, such unaccusative verbs may form impersonal passives when they can be interpreted as volitional actions, as in the following example from Ottósson (1988, fn.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.<sup>18</sup> 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 construction. But note that in fact, adults like (38b, c, d) as much as the adolescents 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 occurring 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 Reykjavík 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 innovation 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 construction is common among adolescents, most adults consider it ungrammatical. However, we have collected a few examples from speakers now in

- 
- (i) Ean er barist og dáið fyrir föðurlandið.  
*still is fought and died for the.fatherland*

Since such coerced readings do not bear on our hypothesis, we have deliberately chosen contexts which favor a nonvolitional interpretation, and not, e.g., the falling or dying of an actor on stage.

<sup>18</sup> According to this suggestion, the results for *svitna* ‘to sweat’ and *deyja* ‘to die’ ought to be similar insofar as both verbs denote changes of state. Further research is needed to determine exactly what factors are relevant.

their forties and fifties.<sup>19</sup> The oldest examples that we know of are from 1959 and 1968.

- (39) a. Það var bólusettt **okkur**.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was inoculated us*  
 We got inoculated. (girl born in Akureyri, 1951)
- b. Það var gefið **mér** nammi.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was given me-DAT candy-ACC*  
 Someone gave me candy. (girl, born in Akranes, 1968)
- c. Það var mótmælt þessum vinnubrögðum.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was opposed these procedures-DAT*  
 People opposed these procedures.  
 (male, born in Vestfirðir, 1942)
- d. Það var truflað **mig** í  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was disturbed me-ACC at [the]*  
 lok þáttarins.  
*end [of] the.program-GEN*  
 Someone disturbed me at the end of the program.  
 (male, born in Norðurland, 1950)
- e. Það var jarðað **hann** í gær.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> 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).

<sup>19</sup> Thanks to Þórhallur Eypórsson for example (38d). Note that the canonical passive of the ditransitive in (38b) would be *Mér var gefið nammi*; 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 (39c–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 Reykjavík 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. Það var fundið **peysuna mína** í dag.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was found sweater mine today*  
 My sweater was found today. (boy, 8 years old)
- b. Það hefur verið gefið þér oft kökur.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> has been given you often cookies*  
 You have often been given cookies. (boy, 8 years old)
- c. Í gær þegar það var gefið mér lýsi þá . . .  
*yesterday when it<sub>EXPL</sub> was given me cod.liver.oil, then*  
 Yesterday, when I was given cod liver oil, then. . . .  
 (girl, 4 years old)
- d. Tígri heldur að það hafi verið rænt honum.  
*Tigger thinks that it<sub>EXPL</sub> has been kidnapped him*  
 Tigger<sub>i</sub> thinks that he<sub>j</sub> has been kidnapped. (girl, 4 years old)

Especially interesting is the following exchange between a 3;2 year old girl and her mother who were talking about a picture of a thief in a storybook (see Haraldsdóttir 1997, p. 23):

- (41) Child: Það er bundið **honum**. (girl, 3 years old)  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> is tied him-DAT*  
 He is tied up.  
 . . .
- Mother: Hvernig er þetta með karlinn?  
*how is this with the.guy*  
 What is it with this guy?
- Child: Hann er bindaður.  
*he-NOM is tied [up]*

It is interesting that the child used the wrong object case in the "new impersonal" construction; the verb *binda* '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 (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 1997). The child also used a weak past participial form, *bindaður*, instead of the correct participle *bundinn* for the strong verb *binda*. If the child's second sentence is indeed a passive rather than an active with predicate adjective, then this discourse 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 none 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.<sup>20</sup>

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.

<sup>20</sup> As Martin Haspelmath and Hans Hock (p.c.) have pointed out to us, there does exist a non-standard construction in German:

- (i) Es wird Bücher gelesen.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was books-ACC read*

Note that the construction seems to allow only determinerless 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 and the theoretical knowledge that NOM and agreement are strongly correlated. 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 tends to be indefinite and inanimate. Native speakers feel that this resembles noun-incorporation, a process which creates an intransitive verb which could then form an impersonal passive.

- (42) **The understood agent of an Impersonal Passive is necessarily [+human]**
- |    |  |             |
|----|--|-------------|
| a. | Pað var flautað.   | (Icelandic) |
| b. | Det visslades.   | (Swedish)   |
| c. | Es wurde gepfiffen.  | (German)    |
| d. | Er werd door de jongen/*de trein gefloten.                   | (Dutch)     |
|    | <i>it<sub>EXPL</sub> was by the boys/*the train whistled</i> |             |
|    | There was whistling by the boys/*the train.                  |             |

As argued by Maling (1993), this semantic generalization, which also holds of the PRO-*arb* subject of uncontrolled infinitival 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.

- (43) a. Snjóflóðið eyðilagði húsið. (Active)  
*the.avalanche destroyed the.house*
- b. \*Húsið var eyðilagt í snjóflóðinu. (Passive)  
*the.house was destroyed in the.avalanche*
- c. Húsið eyðilagðist í snjóflóðinu. (Middle)  
*the.house was.destroyed in the.avalanche*

In the active voice, the subject of a transitive verb like *eyðileggja* '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 in (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.)

(44) **Norwegian impersonal passives**

- a. Det ble danset av alle og enhver i bygda.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was danced by one and all in the.village*  
 Agentive *by*-phrase
- b.\*Det ble hygget seg.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was amused REFL*  
 Bound Anaphors  
 Intended: People had a good time.
- \*Det ble låst seg (selv) inne i fabrikk.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was locked REFL (self) inside in the factory*
- \*Det ble lyttet til hverandre på møtet.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was listened to one.another at the.meeting*
- c.\*Det ble danset leende/gråtende/full/fulle/fullt.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was danced laughing/crying/drunk-sg/pl/neut*  
 Subject Control
- d.\*Under krigen ble det forsvunnet  
*during the.war was it<sub>EXPL</sub> disappeared*  
 Unaccusative verbs  
 ofte uten 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 i/av stormen. (Norwegian)  
*the.house was destroyed in/by the.storm*

Based on our study of the new impersonal in Icelandic, the first stage after the reanalysis 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 adjuncts, 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 infelicitous 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', *verða* 'become, must', *fara* 'go', *byrja* 'begin', *hætta* '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**

Það verður [e] að kjósa hana. (Sigurðsson 1989,  
it must to elect her p. 356, ex. (26))

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

It is striking that aspectual verbs like *vera* 'be', *fara* 'go', *byrja* 'begin', *hætta* 'stop' form impersonal passives.<sup>21</sup>

(47) Það var farið [að PRO moka snjóinn í gær].  
it was gone to PRO shovel the.snow-ACC yesterday

People began shovelling the snow yesterday.

(Sigurðsson 1989, p. 64, ex. (4a))

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. "Í gær þegar það var gefið mér lýsi, þá . . ."  
yesterday when it<sub>EXPL</sub> was given me cod.liver.oil, then . . .  
(girl, age 4:4)

b. Í gær þegar var verið að gefa (standard language)  
yesterday when was been to give  
mér lýsi, þá . . .  
me cod.liver.oil, then . . .

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

<sup>21</sup> 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 unguarded speech of adults. Although least accepted in Inner Reykjavík, 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. Það var rekið Ólaf úr skólanum.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was driven Olaf-ACC from the.school*  
Olaf was kicked out of school.
2. Hún var skilin eftir hjá ömmu og afa.  
*she was left behind at grandma and grandpa's*
3. Það var fleygt draslinu á haugana.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was thrown the.trash-DAT on the.trash.pile*  
The trash was thrown onto the pile.
4. Það var sagt honum upp af forstjóranum.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was said him-DAT up by the.director*  
He was fired by the director.
5. Í morgun var komið of seint í skólann.  
*in morning was come too late in school*  
This morning someone/people arrived at school too late.
6. Svo var bara drifið sig á ball.  
*so was just drove REFL to dance*  
So people just hurried off to the dance.
7. Í dag kennarinn er lasinn.  
*Today the.teacher is sick*
8. Það var leynt hana sannleikanum.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was hidden her-ACC the.truth-DAT*  
The truth was hidden from her.



9. Það var klippt hárið á dúkkunni sinni.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was cut the.hair on the.doll REFL*  
The hair on one's doll was cut.
10. Í dag var hringt heim til foreldranna.  
*today was phoned home to the.parents*  
Today they phoned home to the parents.
11. Það var bent á sjálfan sig á myndinni.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was pointed to self REFL in the.picture*  
People pointed to themselves in the picture.
12. Ég hlakka til jólanna.  
*I lookforward to Christmas*
13. Það var hjálpað hverjum öðrum með verkefnið.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was helped each other-DAT with the.assignment*  
People helped each other with the assignment.
14. Var stúlkuna lamið í klessu?  
*was the.girl-ACC beaten to pieces*  
Was the girl badly beaten up?
15. Það var haldið með sínu liði.  
*it<sub>LNPL</sub> was held with REFL team*  
People rooted for their own teams.
16. Það var safnað peningum fyrir ferð til útlanda.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was collected money-DAT for trip to abroad*  
Money was collected for a trip abroad.
17. Það var sagt öllum krökkunum að fara heim.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was said all the.kids-DAT to go home*  
The kids were all told to go home.
18. Í gær var Harald sótt seint í skólann.  
*yesterday was Harald-ACC sought late in school*  
Yesterday Harald was picked up late at school.
19. Það var komið skellihljajandi inn í tímann.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was come laughing in to class*
20. Á fundinum var lesið bréf frá skólastjóranum.  
*at the.meeting was read letter from the.principal*  
A letter from the school principal was read at the meeting.
21. Það hefur komið Ólafur of seint í skólann í marga daga.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> has come Olaf-NOM too late in school in many days*  
For many days Ólafur has arrived at school too late.

22. Það var lamið barnið í klessu.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was beaten-neut.sg. the.child-neut.sg. in pieces*  
 The child was badly beaten up.
23. Það var skilið hana eftir heima.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was left her-ACC behind at.home*  
 She was left behind at home.
24. Þú hrintir mér af hjólinu sínu.  
*you pushed me-DAT off the.bike REFL-3rd pers.*  
 You pushed me off his own bike.
25. Það var horfið sporlaust í stjórnustríðinu.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was disappeared traceless in the.star.war*  
 In star wars, people disappeared without a trace.
26. Var þig spurt margra spurninga?  
*was you-ACC asked many questions*  
 Were you asked many questions?.
27. Það var haldið sig innan dyra út af óveðrinu.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was held REFL. within doors out of the.bad.weather*  
 People stayed indoors because of the bad weather.
28. Ólafur var rekinn úr skólanum.  
*Olafur-NOM was driven out.of school*  
 Olaf was kicked out of school.
29. Í gær var tekið ökuskírteinið af honum.  
*yesterday was taken driver's.license from him*  
 His driver's license was taken from him yesterday.
30. Það var skoðað bílinn af bifvélavirkjanum.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was examined the.car-ACC by the.mechanic*  
 The car was checked by the mechanic.
31. Það var lesið ljóðið hátt fyrir börnin.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was read-neut.sg the.poem-neut.sg aloud for the.children*  
 The poem was read aloud to the children.
32. Mér langar í ís.  
*me-DAT longs for ice.cream*  
 I want ice cream.
33. Það var skilið barnið eftir hjá ömmu og afa.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was left-neut.sg the.child-neut.sg behind at grandma and grandpa's*  
 The child was left behind at grandma and grandpa's.
34. Það var farið heim til sín.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was gone home to REFL*  
 People went to their homes.

35. Eftir matinn var mig beðið að vaska upp.  
*after dinner was me-ACC asked to wash up*  
 After dinner I was asked to do the dishes.
36. Í morgun var hrint mér af hjólinu.  
*in morning was pushed me-DAT off the.bike*  
 This morning somebody pushed me off my bike.
37. Honum var sagt upp af forstjóranum.  
*him-DAT was said up by the.director*  
 He was fired by the director.
38. Það var beðið óþolinmóður eftir strætó.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was waited-neut.sg impatient-masc.sg for bus*  
 People waited impatiently for the bus.
39. Það var ekki hlustað á hvern annan á fundinum.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was not listened to each other at the.meeting*  
 People didn't listen to one another at the meeting.
40. Í nótt var ekkert svitnað í svefnpokanum.  
*in night was not sweated in the.sleeping.bag*  
 Last night no one sweated in their sleeping bag.
41. Það var skoðað sig um á svæðinu.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was looked REFL about at the.area*  
 People took a look around.
42. Í morgun var sótt Guðmund seint í skólann.  
*in morning was sought Guðmund-ACC late at the.school*  
 This morning, Guðmundur was picked up late at school.
43. Það hafa lært strákarir heima í allan vetur.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> have learned the.boys-NOM at.home in all winter*  
 The boys have learned at home all winter.
44. Í gærkvöldi rigndi það.  
*Yesterday.evening rained it<sub>EXPL</sub>*  
 Yesterday evening it rained.
45. Var hana skilið eftir heima?  
*was her-ACC left behind at.home*  
 Was she left behind at home?
46. Það var farið seint heim.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was gone late home*  
 People went home late.
47. Það var lesið minningargreinina grátandi.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was read the.obituary-ACC crying*  
 People read the obituary crying.

48. Það var sagt mér að taka til.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was said me-DAT to pick up*  
 I was told to clean up.
49. Í morgun var hrint systur sinni af hjólinu.  
*in morning was pushed sister REFL-DAT off the.bike*  
 Someone pushed his own sister off her bike this morning.
50. Það var horft á sjálfan sig í speglinum.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was looked at self REFL in the.mirror*  
 People looked at themselves in the mirror.
51. Það var dansað í kringum jólatréð.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was danced around the.Christmastree*  
 People danced around the Christmas tree.
52. Í tímanum var spurt mig margra spurninga.  
*in the.class was asked me-ACC many questions-GEN*  
 I was asked many questions in class.
53. Var það sagt þér að fara?  
*was it<sub>EXPL</sub> said you-DAT to go*  
 Were you told to leave?
54. Það var farið hágrátandi heim.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was gone loud.crying home*  
 People went home crying loudly.
55. Var lyklana tekið af honum?  
*was the.keys-ACC taken from him*  
 Were the keys taken from him?
56. Það var dáið í bílslysínu.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was died in the.car.accident*  
 Someone/people died in the car accident.
57. Það var samþykkt af öllum í bekknum að fara í keilu.  
*it was agreed by all in the.class to go in bowling.pin*  
 It was agreed by everyone in the class to go bowling.
58. Það var skilið hana eina eftir heima.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was left her-ACC alone-fem.sg. behind at.home*  
 She was left behind alone at home.
59. Það var lamið stúlkuna í klessu.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was beaten the.girl-ACC to pieces*  
 The girl was badly beaten up.
60. Haraldur er ennþá veikt.  
*Harald-NOM is still sick-neut.sg*

61. Það var oft kaffært bróður sinn í sundlauginni.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was often dunked brother REFL in the.swimming.pool*  
 People often dunked their brother in the swimming pool.
62. Það var beðið spennt eftir afmælisveislunni.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was waited-neut.sg excited-neut.sg for the.birthday.party*  
 Someone/people waited for the birthday party all excited.
63. Á kvöldin var skoðað tölvupóstinn sinn.  
*in the.evening was checked the.e-mail REFL*  
 In the evening people checked their e-mail.
64. Það var dottið í hálkunni fyrir framan blokkina.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was fallen on the.ice before front apartment.building*  
 People fell on the ice in front of the apartment building.
65. Það var talað illa um ráðherrann.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was spoken badly about the.government.minister*  
 People spoke poorly of the government minister.
66. Í gær var tekið lykklana af honum.  
*Yesterday was taken the.keys-ACC from him*  
 The keys were taken from him yesterday.
67. Það var beðið mig að vaska upp.  
*it<sub>EXPL</sub> was asked me-ACC to wash up*  
 I was asked to do the dishes.
68. Svo var bara drifið sig einn á ball.  
*so was just driven-neut.sg REFL alone-masc.sg to dance*  
 So someone just hurried off to the dance alone.

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