Word Order Variation in the VP in Old Icelandic

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to describe and account for the word order variation found in the VP in Old Icelandic. It is shown that even though the IP in Old Icelandic was clearly head-initial, with movement of the finite verb to I^0 accounting for the obligatory verb-second word order, the headedness of the VP is far from obvious. The majority of the logically possible word order patterns actually occur in the VP in Old Icelandic, and because of the frequency and stability of OV-order, together with the distribution of pronominal objects and particles, it is not feasible to assume that the VP in Old Icelandic was uniformly either head-initial or head-final. By assuming that the head parameter was unspecified, we can account for the great majority of all Old Icelandic sentences without positing any movement of constituents of the VP, except for postposing of full NPs; this appears to be the most natural way of accounting for the variation. Finally, it is pointed out that the `Minimalist' conception of structure-building and lexical insertion makes it natural to assume that the same word order principles apply to base-generated structures and to structures derived by syntactic movement.[*]

1. Introduction

1.1 Word order variation

Old Icelandic texts exhibit considerable variation in post-Infl word order.[1] A few of the patterns found are illustrated by the examples in (1):

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[1] For convenience, I will in most cases use the terms **IP** and **I**, instead of assuming a more complex structure with a T-projection and two Agr-projections (cf. Chomsky 1993); but this does not mean that I want to reject the split-Infl hypothesis.

(1) a. Lýtingur af Sámsstöðum [$_{IP}$ mun [$_{VP}$ hafa vegið hann
Lyting of Samsstadir   will   have killed him
og   bræður hans]]
and   brothers his
'Lyting from Samsstadir will have killed him and his brothers.'

(Brennu-Njáls saga, p. 243)

b. En   ekki [$_{IP}$ mun eg [$_{VP}$ þenna mann séð hafa]].
But not   will I   this   man   seen have
'But I believe I have not seen this man.'   *(Laxdæla saga, p. 1632)*

c. Þorgilsi [$_{IP}$ hafði [$_{VP}$ gefin verið öxi góð]].
Thorgils (D)   had   given been axe good
'Thorgils had been given a good axe.'   *(Þorgils saga og Hafliða, p. 25)*

d. Ekki [$_{IP}$ vildi   eg [$_{VP}$ þér   mein hafa gert] ...].
not   would I   you   harm have done
'I wouldn't want to do you any harm.'

(Gunnars þáttur Þiðrandabana, p. 2141)

Sentences like (1a), with the word order *finite verb - auxiliary/modal verb - main verb -object*, could just as well be from Modern Icelandic; this is the only possible order of these elements in Modern Icelandic. I will refer to this word order as 'pure' VO-order.

   Unlike Modern Icelandic, however, several other orders of the elements following the finite verb are also possible; some of them are shown in (1b-d). I will refer to examples like (1b), which have the word order *finite verb - object - main verb - auxiliary/modal verb* as 'pure' OV-order; this is the (canonical) superficial word order of German and Dutch main clauses, for instance.

   But a considerable portion of sentences with non-finite verbs have different types of 'mixed' word order, as (1c-d) show. In (1c), the word order is *finite verb - main verb - auxiliary verb - object*. Thus, the order of the two non-finite verbs is OV, but the object is in final position as in a VO-language. In (1d), the word order is *finite verb - object - auxiliary verb - main verb*. Here, the order of the non-finite verb is consistent with a VO-base, but the object precedes the non-finite verbs as in an OV-language. I will refer to examples like (1c-d) as 'mixed' types. I can add that sentence types like (1a-c) are all very common, whereas (1d) is rare.

1.2 VSO, SVO, or SOV?

As the examples in (1) indicate, Old Icelandic (or Old Norse) is (or was) a language with relatively free word order, compared to modern Icelandic at least. There is no doubt whatsoever that Modern Icelandic is SVO, with both IP and VP being head-initial. One of the main characteristics of Old Icelandic, as opposed to Modern Icelandic, is what appears to be the extremely frequent placement of the finite verb in initial position in narrative prose - the so-called 'Narrative Inversion'. Some authors have even suggested that VS was the basic word order of Old Icelandic (Heusler 1967), or that SV and VS were equally basic (Kossuth 1978a). Sigurðsson (1994) has studied this phenomenon in great detail, and compared it to the situation in Modern Icelandic. His conclusion is that the frequency of Narrative Inversion is often exaggerated; and he demonstrates that it was almost exclusively a root phenomenon. Thus, there are no reasons to believe that Old Icelandic ever had VSO as its basic structure.[2]

This leaves two possibilities; SVO and SOV. Actually, the situation is more complex than that, since the 'VO' part of the pattern comprises (at least) two different maximal projections, IP and VP; and it is at least a logical possibility that they differ in 'headedness', one of them being head-initial, whereas the other being head-final. It is usually assumed that the headedness of individual phrases is subject to parametric variation. The main clause - subordinate clause asymmetry of German and Dutch is, for instance, usually attributed to such differences in headedness. It is assumed that the 'head parameter' takes the 'initial' value for the CP in these languages, but the 'final' value for the IP (cf., however, Zwart (1993) for a different view). Since the finite verb is assumed to be in C^0 in main clauses, but in I^0 in (most) subordinate clauses, this difference in headedness inevitably leads to superficial SVO-order in main clauses, whereas (most) subordinate clauses are SOV (see den Besten 1983 and many others).

Old Icelandic is a 'Verb-Second language' just as Modern Icelandic; there are no instances of the inflected verb in final position, neither in main clauses nor in subordinate clauses. Thus, the IP in Old Icelandic was clearly head-initial, like it is in Modern Icelandic; there are no traces of head-final IPs. In this respect, there do not seem to be any differences between main and subordinate clauses; there is no indication of an asymmetry similar to that found in German and Dutch, for instance.[3] Given that finite verbs must move to I^0 (be it to pick up inflectional

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[2] As a matter of fact, Sigurðsson (1994) argues that the frequency of Narrative Inversion has not declined remarkably, as long as only comparable texts are compared. Narrative Inversion is characteristic of certain style types, indicates cohesion, continuity, etc. Most of the preserved texts in Old Icelandic belong to types where Narrative Inversion is appropriate. On the other hand, such texts are relatively rare in Modern Icelandic; but when they do occur, Narrative Inversion appears to be just as acceptable and frequent as it is in the Family Sagas.

[3] It is important to notice that personal pronouns do not cliticize on I^0, resulting in superficial V3-order; in my corpus I have only found one sentence with the finite verb in third position:

features/morphemes or for feature checking), this entails that sentences with no auxiliary or modal verbs will always show superficial VO-order, regardless of the headedness of the VP.[4]

The variation illustrated in (1) is clearly at the VP-level. Given that Old Icelandic had a VP constituent, as I take to be beyond doubt (Rögnvaldsson 1995; cf., however, Faarlund 1990), the post-Infl word order could in principle be accounted for along one of the following lines:

(2) a. The Old Icelandic VP could have been head-initial (giving basic VO-order), with extensive movement (of pronominal objects and non-finite verbs) to the left.

    b. The Old Icelandic VP could have been head-final (giving basic OV-order), with extensive movement (of full NPs and non-finite verbs) to the right.

    c. The Old Icelandic VP could have been variably head-initial or head-final (giving either OV- or VO-order); i.e., the choice could have been (more or less) free.

In the generative literature on Old Icelandic, it is usually assumed that the basic word order of the language was VO; that is, both IP and VP were head-initial (cf. especially Sigurðsson 1988). However, I will argue in this paper that clear evidence

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(i) Og   er   þeir gengið höfðu um hríð ...
    and when they walked had   on a while
    'And when they had walked for a while ...'   *(Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, p. 988)*
Admittedly, Infl-final subordinate clauses are frequent in (later) religious prose, especially from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:

(ii) Og eg   em   Jóhannes sem þetta séð   og heyrt   hefir.
    And I   am   John   who this seen and heard   has
    'And I am John, who has both seen and heard this.'   *(Nýja testamentið [1540], p. 558)*

Such sentences can be attributed to foreign (Low German) influences, and do not seem to have had any long-standing effects on the syntax (cf. also Sigurðsson 1988).

[4] In non-finite clauses, where there is no verb movement to I^0, we can get pure OV-order (with the object immediately following the subject). (ia) is an ECM-construction, whereas (ib) has a (object-controlled) PRO as the subject of the subordinate clause.

(i) a. Hallfreður sagði sig   það gjarna   vilja.
    Hallfred   said REFL it   gladly want
    'Hallfred said that he would gladly do it.'   *(Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds, p. 1244)*

  b. Grímur bað   hann það fyrst gera.
    Grimur asked him   it   first   do
    'Grim asked that he did this first.'   *(Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar, p. 416)*

can be found against assuming a VO-base for all Old Icelandic sentences. But it is not feasible either to postulate an OV-base for all sentences. Instead, I propose, following several recent studies (Kroch 1989; Santorini 1989, 1992; Pintzuk 1991) that Old Icelandic had 'variable base' for the VP; i.e., it was alternatively head-initial or head-final. It appears that the best way of accounting for the differences in word order is to assume that children could not set the head parameter because of the confusing data they were presented with.

Recently, however, Kayne (1994) has proposed that all phrases in all languages are underlyingly head-initial. If correct, this would of course mean that no such thing as a 'variable base' could exist; Old Icelandic would be underlyingly SVO, just like the modern language. It is of course possible that Kayne's proposal will eventually turn out to be correct, but at the present stage of our knowledge, it must be regarded only as a theoretical proposal, albeit an interesting and exciting one - not as a fact. I will show in this paper that strong empirical arguments against this proposal can be found in Old Icelandic.

1.3 Sources

Before I proceed, a few remarks on terminology, data and the sources used are in order.

The term 'Old Icelandic' (or 'Old Norse') is usually taken to mean the language of the narrative prose texts written in Iceland in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. However, none of these texts is found in the original; most of them are only preserved in manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth (and in a few cases sixteenth) centuries. This makes it extremely difficult to assess the validity of these texts as linguistic evidence, since it is often impossible to know whether a certain feature of the preserved text stems from the original or from the scribe of the preserved copy, or perhaps from the scribe of an intermediate link between the original and the preserved manuscript. It is well known that scribes often did not retain the spelling of the original when they made copies; instead, they used the spelling that they were used to. In many cases, two or more manuscripts of the same text are preserved, and usually they differ to a greater or lesser extent.

However, it is usually assumed that the syntax of Old Icelandic did not change much in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Therefore, I feel justified in lumping together various narrative texts from these centuries and treating them as if they exhibit the same stage of the language. In working with these texts, I have not noticed any significant syntactic differences between those that are assumed to be relatively old and preserved in older manuscripts, and those that are considered relatively young and are preserved in younger manuscripts. It is possible that future research will show that it is illegitimate to treat these texts as roughly contemporaneous; but in doing so, I follow the standard practice of traditional

syntactic descriptions (see especially Nygaard 1905; Heusler 1967).

All examples from Old Icelandic have been collected from a new concordance to the *Íslendinga sögur* (Rögnvaldsson et al. 1996) and unpublished concordances to *Sturlunga saga* (Rögnvaldsson 1993a) and *Heimskringla* (Rögnvaldsson 1993b). These concordances are based on new editions with modern Icelandic spelling (see the list of sources at the end of the paper). It must be emphasized that these editions are not completely reliable as sources of syntactic evidence; but since I do not base any theoretical or empirical claims on only one or two examples, I find it extremely unlikely that possible inaccuracies in these editions might affect any of my arguments.[5]

2. Word order patterns in the VP

2.1 Examples

At first sight, it might seem that almost any order of constituents can occur in the VP in Old Icelandic. Let us first look at examples of the various word order patterns I have found in my corpus. Note that the examples are from both main and subordinate clauses; since there does not seem to be any main clause - subordinate clause asymmetry in the VP, as mentioned above, I have not seen any reason to keep these two clause types apart.[6]

(3) *Sentences with one non-finite verb and one object:*

   a. Eg mun   þiggja hrossin.
          I   will   accept horses-the
          'I will accept the horses.'   *(Víga-Glúms saga, p. 1927)*

   b. Faðir minn mun   því ráða.
          father my   will   it   decide
          'My father will decide that.'   *(Víglundar saga, p. 1976)*

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[5] See, however, Sigurðsson (1985) for an illustration of changes made by editors of Old Icelandic texts.

[6] These examples are only meant to illustrate the relative order of (non-finite) verbs and objects. Various types of adverbials and prepositional phrases can intervene between these elements, but I have chosen not to take them into account in this study. It must also be mentioned that it is far from being clear what kind of complements the various auxiliaries and modal verbs take; see Thráinsson (1993, 1996).

(4) *Sentences with one non-finite verb and two objects:*

    a. Jarlinn hafði gefið honum skipið.
       Earl-the had given him ship-the
       'The earl had given him the ship.'   *(Íslendinga saga, p. 263)*

    b. ... og muntu henni gefa moturinn ...
       and will-you her give cap-the ...
       '... and you will give her the cap.'   *(Laxdæla saga, p. 1602)*

    c. ... að hann hefir líf gefið barninu.
       that he has life given child-the
       '... that he has saved the child's life.'
                                 (Harðar saga og Hólmverja, p. 1259)

    d. ... því að þú hefir mér líf gefið...
       because you have me life given ...
       '... because you have saved my life.'   *(Gísla saga Súrssonar, p. 938)*

(5) *Sentences with two non-finite verbs and one object:*

    a. ... að sárið mundi hafa grandað honum.
       that wound-the would have killed him
       '... that the wound would have killed him.'   *(Bandamanna saga, p. 25)*

    b. Nú munu þær eigi hafa því unað ...
       now will they (fem) not have it tolerated...
       'Now they will not have tolerated this ...'   *(Þiðranda þáttur, p. 2255)*

    c. ... og hann mundi tekið hafa hross þeirra.
       and he would taken have horses their
       '... and he would have taken their horses.'   *(Vatnsdæla saga, p. 1903)*

    d. ... og kvaðst það hafa gert til yfirbóta við hana.
       and said it have done to compensate to her
       '... and said that (he) had done this for her to compensate.'
                                   (Bjarnar saga Hídtdælakappa, p. 88)

    e. ... og kvaðst enginn maður þetta gera vilja.
       and said no man this do want
       '... and everybody said that they did not want to do this.'
                                   (Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða, p. 1407)

(6) *Sentences with two non-finite verbs and two objects:*

   a.   ... en Eyjólfur kvaðst hafa gefið   Bjarna sauðina.
         but Eyjolf   said   have given Bjarni sheep-the
         '... but Eyjolf said that he had given Bjarni the sheep.'

                                                        (Reykdæla saga, p. 1769)

   b. Páll kveðst ætla að   lög   mundu honum bera   féin ...
      Pal says   think that law   would him   attribute money-the
      'Pal says that he thinks that he should have the money by law.'

                                                           (Sturlu saga, p. 92)

   c. Gísli kveðst aldrei mundu Kolbeini   eiða sverja.
      Gisli says   never will   Kolbeinn oaths swear
      'Gisli says he will never swear to be faithful to Kolbeinn.'

                                                     (Þórðar saga kakala, p. 460)

   d. Ófeigur ... kveðst ekki mundu   mikla tillögu veita honum.
      Ofeig   says   not   will   great help   give him
      'Ofeig says that he will not be able to help him much.'

                                                     (Bandamanna saga, p. 26)

   e. ... en   hann mundi fengið hafa henni mikinn áverka.
      ... but he   would given have her   great   wound
      '... but he would have hurt her badly.'

                                          (Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, p. 1006)

   f. Ásbjörn lést honum mundu gefa fé   til.
      Asbjorn said him   would give money to
      'Asbjorn said that he would give him money for doing it.'

                                              (Hákonar saga herðibreiðs, p. 808)

     g. ... hví Bolli mun sér   hafa þar   svo staðar leitað ...
           why Bolli will REFL have there so place   sought ...
     '... why Bolli will have chosen himself such a place to hide.'

                                                     (Laxdæla saga, p. 1613)

     h. Hallbjörn ... kveðst enn hverjum manni veitt   hafa búðar rúm ...
         Hallbjorn ... says yet every   man   given have booth-place ...
     'Hallbjorn says that up to now, he has offered every man lodging in his
   booth.'   *(Gísla saga Súrssonar, p. 940)*

i. Bárður kvaðst honum engi mundu segja.
    Bard   said   him   no   would say
    'Bard said that he would not tell him any [news].'

(Króka-Refs saga, p. 1528)

j. ... að   þessi maður mundi honum sanna hluti   sagt hafa.
        that this man   would him   true   things said have
    '... that this man would have told him the truth.'

(Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar, p. 179)

k. Þykist   eg nú   það   hafa launað þér.
    believe I now it   have payed you
    'I believe I have now payed you for that.'

(Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, p. 1042)

l. Hann kveðst fyrir löngu það   hafa honum spáð   ...
    he   says   for long   it   have him   foretold ...
    'He says that he has long ago foretold him this.'

(Finnboga saga ramma, p. 634)

m. ... en kveðst segja honum mundu fyrstum   tíðindin.
        but says   say him   will   first-of-all news-the
    '... but says that he will be the first man whom he will tell the news.'

(Brennu-Njáls saga, p. 339)

2.2 Existing and non-existing patterns

In (7)-(10), I show which of the logical possibilities are actually attested in my corpus.[7]

(7) *Sentences with one non-finite verb and one object (= (3)):*[8]

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[7] I have omitted the patterns where the two objects are adjacent, but their order is reversed, such that the direct object precedes the indirect object. This is sometimes possible in Modern Icelandic (see Rögnvaldsson 1990), and the situation appears to be similar in Old Icelandic.

[8] (XP) = initial phrase (optional); V_{fin} = finite verb; $V_{aux/mod}$ = auxiliary or modal (non-finite) verb); V_{main} = main (non-finite) verb; NP_{DO} = direct object; NP_{IO} = indirect object. The patterns that I have found no examples of are starred. The possibility that my corpus contains isolated examples of (some of) the starred patterns can not be excluded, but in any case such examples are extremely few.

a.　(XP) - V_{fin} - V_{main} - NP_{DO}
b.　(XP) - V_{fin} - NP_{DO} - V_{main}

(8) *Sentences with one non-finite verb and two objects (= (4)):*
a.　(XP) - V_{fin} - V_{main} - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO}
b.　(XP) - V_{fin} - NP_{IO} - V_{main} - NP_{DO}
c.　(XP) - V_{fin} - NP_{DO} - V_{main} - NP_{IO}
d.　(XP) - V_{fin} - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO} - V_{main}

(9) *Sentences with two non-finite verbs and one object (= (5)):*
a.　(XP) - V_{fin} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - V_{main} - NP_{DO}
b.　(XP) - V_{fin} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{DO} - V_{main}
c.　(XP) - V_{fin} - V_{main} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{DO}
d.　(XP) - V_{fin} - NP_{DO} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - V_{main}
e.　(XP) - V_{fin} - NP_{DO} - V_{main} - $V_{aux/mod}$
f.　*(XP) - V_{fin} - V_{main} - NP_{DO} - $V_{aux/mod}$

(10) *Sentences with two non-finite verbs and two objects (= (6)):*
a.　(XP) - V_{fin} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - V_{main} - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO}
b.　(XP) - V_{fin} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{IO} - V_{main} - NP_{DO}
c.　(XP) - V_{fin} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO} - V_{main}
d.　(XP) - V_{fin} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{DO} - V_{main} - NP_{IO}
e.　(XP) - V_{fin} - V_{main} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO}
f.　(XP) - V_{fin} - NP_{IO} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - V_{main} - NP_{DO}
g.　(XP) - V_{fin} - NP_{IO} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{DO} - V_{main}
h.　(XP) - V_{fin} - NP_{IO} - V_{main} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{DO}
i.　(XP) - V_{fin} - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - V_{main}
j.　(XP) - V_{fin} - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO} - V_{main} - $V_{aux/mod}$
k.　(XP) - V_{fin} - NP_{DO} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - V_{main} - NP_{IO}
l.　(XP) - V_{fin} - NP_{DO} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{IO} - V_{main}
m.　(XP) - V_{fin} - NP_{DO} - V_{main} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{IO}
n.　*(XP) - V_{fin} - V_{main} - NP_{IO} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{DO}
o.　*(XP) - V_{fin} - V_{main} - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO} - $V_{aux/mod}$
p.*　(XP) - V_{fin} - V_{main} - NP_{DO} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{IO}
q.　*(XP) - V_{fin} - NP_{IO} - V_{main} - NP_{DO} - $V_{aux/mod}$
r.　*(XP) - V_{fin} - NP_{DO} - V_{main} - NP_{IO} - $V_{aux/mod}$

Only the *a*-patterns would be grammatical in Modern Icelandic, cf. above.

It is clear, of course, that the patterns that do exist are not all equally common. Both patterns in (7) are frequent. (8a) is frequent, whereas the other patterns in (8) are rather rare. (9a), (9c) and (9e) are frequent, but (9b) and (9d) are rare. Most of the patterns in (10) are rare; after all, sentences with two non-finite verbs and two

objects are comparatively few. However, I think it is clear that (10a) is the most common pattern, and (10h-j) also seem to be relatively common, whereas the other existing patterns are very rare.

In the light of this diversity, it might look rather natural to claim that the finite verb could be followed by any number of elements in any order, as the following general scheme is intended to show (Faarlund 1990:110; cf. also Chomsky 1981:128; Hale 1983:7):

(11) S -> (XP) V$_{[+T]}$ XP*

This scheme 'says that the finite verb is preceded by at most one element of any category and is followed by any number of elements (including null) of any category' (Faarlund 1990:110). Faarlund argues that neither grammatical relations nor the (S-structure) positions of the subject and the object in Old Icelandic were determined by structural relations, but rather by other factors; especially the case and the semantic role carried by each NP and the information structure of the sentence.

Thus, Faarlund (1990) argues at great length that Old Norse (Old Icelandic) was a 'non-configurational' language, in contrast to its descendants, Modern (New) Norwegian and Modern Icelandic, which are uncontroversially configurational according to Faarlund. He claims that 'Old Norse seems to be a language with no convincing evidence for a VP constituent' (1990:101). However, others have expressed doubts that the syntactic differences between Old Norse and its descendants can be as great as Faarlund claims (see Platzack 1991).

Furthermore, recent developments in generative grammar have moved away from the distinction between configurational and non-configurational languages, and many, if not most, generative syntacticians now seem to believe that the X'-theory (and binary branching) can adequately account for the syntactic structure of all languages.

I have shown elsewhere (Rögnvaldsson 1995) that the syntactic changes from Old to Modern Icelandic are far from being as radical as the reversal of the configurationality parameter would entail. Clear evidence can be found for the existence of the VP as a **syntactic** constituent in Old Icelandic; and even though we accept a distinction between configurational and non-configurational languages, Old Icelandic could not be counted among the latter.

3. Basic order in the VP: OV, VO, or both?

3.1 OV vs. VO: Reanalysis

As pointed out above, the IP in Old Icelandic was clearly head-initial. If we accept

the general opinion that the IP in Proto-Norse was head-final (cf., for instance, Lehmann 1974; Antonsen 1981) it is clear that at the IP-level, reanalysis had already taken place at the time of the earliest Icelandic texts.[9] Sigurðsson (1988) argues that at that time, reanalysis of the head parameter had also taken place in the VP. Thus, he claims that Old Icelandic was uniformly VO in D-structure, but that extensive leftward movement of non-finite verb forms, objects and adverbial/prepositional phrases could give rise to different surface word orders; both what looked like pure OV-order and also several types of mixed OV-VO-order, as illustrated in (3)-(6) above. Sigurðsson thus claims that at a certain time, prior to the writing of the oldest preserved Icelandic manuscripts, the former Grammar A was replaced by Grammar B (Sigurðsson 1988:23):

(12) Grammar A: >   Grammar B:
       Basic OV   Basic VO
       + VO by transformations   + OV by transformations
          (V-to-I and rightward movement   (leftward movement of
          of 'O', e.g. Heavy NP-Shift)   'O')

Thus, sentences with the word order *auxiliary/modal verb - main verb - object*, like (13b), which Grammar A derives from the OV-base (13a) by applying two movements as indicated, will be taken as basic in Grammar B, and sentences displaying the old basic order, *object - main verb - auxiliary/modal verb*, like (14b), will have to be derived from the new VO-base in (14a) by two movements.

(13) a. OV-base: Eg mun [$_{VP}$ manninn séð hafa]
         (Grammar A)   I   will   man-the   seen have

     b. Derived: Eg mun [$_{VP}$ t_i t_j hafa séð$_j$ manninn$_i$]

(14) a. VO-base: Eg mun [$_{VP}$ hafa   séð   hana]
         (Grammar B)   I   will   have   seen her

     b. Derived: Eg mun [$_{VP}$ hana$_i$ séð$_j$ hafa t_j t_i]

Sigurðsson points out that of course, a sudden reanalysis like this must not lead to mutual incomprehensibility between different generations of speakers. Therefore, Grammar A and Grammar B must be able to generate approximately the same sets of sentences. Thus, reanalysis not only results in a change in the setting of the head

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[9] If Kayne's (1994) anti-symmetry proposal is correct, then it follows that there never was any reanalysis, since Proto-Norse, Proto-Germanic and Indo-European must all have been SVO, like all other languages at all stages in their history.

parameter (or the directionality parameter of verb government); it also leads to the simultaneous introduction of several leftward movement rules, which apply mainly to pronominal objects and non-finite verb forms; cf. (14b).[10] Sigurðsson's analysis is thus very much in line with Lightfoot's (1979) conception of syntactic reanalysis.

It is important to realize that prior to reanalysis, Grammar A is capable of generating sentences like (13b), with surface word order that is the same as the basic word order of grammar B, (14a). Therefore, the reanalysis does not lead to the introduction of any new sentence types, it seems. On the other hand, the basic word order of Grammar A will not be compatible with Grammar B unless a change in the transformational component also takes place - which is, of course, exactly what Sigurðsson (1988) proposes, as mentioned above.

However, it is not clear that it is necessary for speakers who use Grammar B to be able to **produce** sentences with OV-order; it might be argued that it is only necessary for them to **understand** such sentences, and only as long as there are still speakers who use Grammar A. It is of course common knowledge that being able to understand some construction does not necessarily entail the ability of actually using this construction in one's own speech. For instance, speakers of Modern Icelandic usually have no difficulties in reading and understanding Old Icelandic sentences with pure OV-order, even though this order is ungrammatical in Modern Icelandic. Given recent 'economy' trends in generative syntax (see especially Chomsky 1993, 1995), it seems rather unlikely that several generations of speakers using Grammar B would have continued using OV-sentences productively after reanalysis had taken place.

In the light of this, it is interesting to note that OV-order appears to have been quite frequent for several centuries after the alleged reanalysis. I have investigated fragments of more than 30 different texts from different periods in the history of Icelandic (see Rögnvaldsson 1994-95). The earliest texts are from the thirteenth century, and the latest are from the second half of the nineteenth century. My investigation confirmed the results of an earlier pilot study by Indriðason (1987). The percentage of sentences showing OV-characteristics (i.e., either pure or mixed OV order) is relatively stable, ranging from 30-50% in most of the texts up to the second half of the eighteenth century. In a few texts from the late sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries, the percentage of OV-order reaches 60%. This is not surprising, since many of the texts from these centuries are translations, and it is well known that Low German had considerable influence on

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[10] Note that Sigurðsson is working in a pre-*Barriers* framework, and some of the movements he posits would not be allowed given standard conditions on movement nowadays. For instance, his analysis (1988:27) of the order *main verb - auxiliary/modal verb - object* violates conditions on adjunction, since the main verb is adjoined to the (higher) VP. This is not to say that Sigurðsson's analysis could not be translated into the current framework; in a way, this is what Hróarsdóttir (1996) is doing.

Icelandic in this period.

My investigation shows that the frequency of OV-order starts to drop significantly in the first decades of the nineteenth century, and OV-order does not seem to occur in the texts of people born after 1800. This has recently been confirmed by Hróarsdóttir's (1995, 1996) extensive study. Thus, OV- and VO-order coexist in the VP for at least seven centuries. This is interesting, since the change from OV to VO is usually assumed to have taken much shorter time in other related languages. Coming back to the alleged reanalysis, it is difficult to see how these facts can be accommodated with the idea that reanalysis of basic word order from OV to VO took place in the twelfth century.[11]

It might be argued that this relative stability of OV-order through the centuries does not in fact reflect the 'real language' of the speakers; it is often claimed that the Saga style has affected the written language very much. It is known that the Sagas were read by many people, and people kept making new copies of old manuscripts. But I find it hard to believe that this can be responsible for the high percentage of OV-order for such a long time. Narrative Inversion, for instance, is still perfectly grammatical in certain styles, especially in narrative style similar to the Sagas (cf. fn. 2 above); but OV-order is completely ungrammatical, no matter what the style is.

This stability of OV-order is one of my reasons for doubting that Old Icelandic was uniformly VO in the base. In his paper, Sigurðsson (1988) discusses the possibility that Old Icelandic was still uniformly OV in the base instead, and the surface VO-patterns are derived by rightward movement of objects and other parts of the VP. He rejects this possibility, mainly because of the existence of sentences like (15), where a pronominal object is in final position:

(15) a. ... hvort   hún vill   eiga hann.
          whether she   will   own   him
          '... whether she wants to marry him.'   *(Brennu-Njáls saga, p. 142)*

     b. ... en þú   hefir nú   svikið   hann.
          but you   have now betrayed him
          '... but now you have betrayed him.'   *(Reykdæla saga, p. 1779)*

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[11] It must also be pointed out that given OV basic order, we can find plausible 'explanations' for much of the rightward movement that would be necessary to derive the surface word order patterns that occur in Old Icelandic. Heavy NP-Shift, for instance, is independently motivated (cf. (20) below), and is frequent in Modern Icelandic. But it is quite unlikely that all the leftward movement we would have to assume after reanalysis could be explained just as easily. Even though we would have to say that the grammar had to adopt such rules to make reanalysis possible, we would expect that it would try to get rid of them as soon as possible, since they were not independently motivated on any pragmatic grounds; their only motivation was to facilitate reanalysis.

c. Þeir kváðust fyrir víst hafa séð hann.
     they said   for   sure have seen him
     'They said that they had surely seen him.'

(Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, p. 1089)

In a language with OV as the only possibility in the base, (15a-b) would presumably have to be derived by rightward movement of the pronominal object across the main verb. Sigurðsson writes (1988:31): 'I do not know of a single established case of a postposing process applying to pronominal objects.' This may very well be true, and sentences like (15) are clearly arguments against a uniform OV-base (although they can not be used as arguments for a pure VO-base either).

It might be possible to derive sentences with only one non-finite verb, like (15a-b), from an OV-base by leftward movement of the main verb. However, such movement is otherwise unmotivated; and in sentences with two non-finite verb, like (15c), this is not enough. In such sentences, we would not only have to move the main verb leftward; the auxiliary/modal verb must also be moved. Furthermore, these movements would have to be somehow connected; it could not be allowed to move only the main verb, leaving the auxiliary/modal verb in situ, since this would lead to a pattern not found in Old Icelandic, cf. (22) below. The other possibility, *auxiliary/modal verb - pronominal object - main verb*, does exist, but is extremely rare.

Thus, I conclude that it is not feasible to posit a uniform OV-base for Old Icelandic; and the arguments for a uniform VO-base are also rather weak.

3.2 Arguments for a variable base

If Old Icelandic was uniformly VO in the base, sentences with pure OV-order and two non-finite verbs, like (1b) above, will have to be derived by two leftward movements; movement of the main verb and (presumably) adjunction to the non-finite auxiliary/modal verb, and movement of the object, presumably to SpecAgrOP (cf. Hróarsdóttir 1995 and fn. 10 above). It is clear that these two movements are independent of each other, since we have many examples with mixed word order where **either** the main verb (as in (1c), for instance) **or** the object (as in (1d), for instance) has been moved leftward (given VO-base). Actually, most of these mixed word order patterns only show movement of the main verb to the left, given VO-base; sentences with the order *object - auxiliary/modal verb - main verb* (i.e., sentences where only the object moves leftward whereas the finite verb stays in place) are rare.

Thus, given VO-base, movement of the main verb to the left, without any movement of the object, is very frequent. It is not obvious why this should be so.

It makes sense to maintain that Old Icelandic could optionally have strong N-features in SpecAgrOP, which, if present, would cause obligatory movement of the object to SpecAgrOP in the syntax, instead of postponing the movement to LF according to the procrastinate principle (cf. Chomsky 1993; Hróarsdóttir 1996). But it is not obvious what features would cause movement of the main verb over the auxiliary; and the strength of the relevant features obviously does not correlate with the strength of the N-features in SpecAgrOP. Hróarsdóttir (1996:132) only mentions 'the relevant features of the non-finite-verb position' in a footnote; but she does not explain these features nor characterize them in any way.

In this connection, it must also be noted that in some cases, two non-finite verbs must be moved leftward if all sentences have a VO-base:

(16) ... hann ... kveðst gert hafa mundu meira ...
      he   says   done have would   more
   '... he says that he would have done more ...' *(Gísla saga Súrssonar, p. 897)*

(17) ... sumir menn ætla hann skírðan verið hafa á Englandi
      some men   think him baptized been have in England
   '... some people think he was baptized in England.' *(Svaða þáttur, p. 2251)*

In other cases, the main verb would have to be moved over two non-finite verbs:

(18) ... en eg ætla mig aldrei heyrt munu hafa það nafn ...
      but I believe me never heard will have that name
   '... but I believe I have never heard that name ...'
                                    (Prestssaga Guðmundar Arasonar, p. 111)

It is difficult to see how sentences like these could be derived from a VO-base without violating principles like Relativized Minimality (Rizzi 1990) and the like.

If all sentences have a VO-base, it is also puzzling that the word order *main verb - auxiliary/modal verb - object* is very frequent if the object is a full NP, but is almost nonexistent if the object is a pronoun. I have only found one such example in my corpus:

(19) ... eða þættist séð hafa hann fyrr.
      or thought seen have him before
   '... or thought that (he) had seen him before.'
                                      (Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar, p. 661)

Note that it is not the case that pronominal objects must move with the verb (such that we get V'-movement instead of V-movement); the word order *main verb - object - auxiliary/modal verb* does not exist. Hróarsdóttir (1996:109) claims that the

low frequency of sentences like (19) 'follows if we assume a uniform VO-base and an obligatory movement of (weak) pronouns. Cases where the verb precedes the pronoun would then possibly be cases where the pronoun is stressed or marked in some other way'. But note that sentences with pure VO-order like (15) above, where an object pronoun immediately follows a non-finite main verb, are common, and it seems extremely unlikely that the pronoun should be analyzed as stressed or somehow especially marked in all these sentences.

Moreover, sentences where only the object is moved, be it a pronoun or a full NP, are rare, as mentioned in the Introduction. Thus, it is hardly possible to assume any obligatory leftward movement of weak object pronouns in Old Icelandic. If we want to maintain that Old Icelandic was uniformly VO in the base, we will have to come up with some plausible answer to the following question: Why is leftward movement of object pronouns (almost) obligatory in sentences where the main verb moves leftward, but very rare in sentences where the main verb stays in place? Of course, it may very well be possible to find a satisfactory answer to this question; but as far as I know, noone has done so yet.

If an OV-base is a possibility, however, everything falls in place rather easily. Then we do not have to posit any leftward movement of the main verb. Sentences with pure OV-order, where we would have to postulate two movements under the VO-hypothesis, will simply be base-generated as such, and no movement is needed. Sentences with mixed word order, of the type *main verb - auxiliary/modal verb - full NP object* - which is by far the most common mixed order, as pointed out above - will be analyzed as underlyingly OV, with postposing of the object.[12] Note that we need postposing rules in any case to account for the placement of the subject in sentences like (20) (cf. also Pintzuk 1991:161-162).

(20) a. Guðný var systir hans er átti *Vermundur mjóvi.*
       Gudny was sister his who owned Vermund the slim
       'His sister was Gudny, who Vermund the slim was married to.'
                                                        (Eyrbyggja saga, p. 547)

   b. ... svo sem verið hafði *Egill eða Þórólfur* á hans aldri.
          so as been had Egil or Thorolf on his age
       '... as Egil or Thorolf had been at his age.'
                                                        (Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar, p. 489)

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[12] Arguing against my variable base analysis, Hróarsdóttir (1996:112) writes: 'It may however not be so simple to derive all frequent OV-orders from an OV-base either [...].' I have never said that all the necessary derivations would be simple, but it is nevertheless quite clear that most of them will be considerably simpler than the derivations needed to derive all the patterns from a VO-base.

c. En þenna mann hafði sent *Sturla Sighvatsson* ...
   but this man had sent Sturla Sighvatsson
   'But Sturla Sighvatsson had sent this man.' (*Íslendinga saga, p. 389*)

This accounts elegantly for the nonexistence of sentences with the order *main verb - auxiliary/modal verb - pronominal object*, provided that such sentences should be derived from an OV-base; they would have to be derived by rightward movement of the pronominal object, and such movement presumably does not exist, cf. above. If a VO-base is the only option, we will have to derive sentences of the frequent type *main verb - auxiliary/modal verb - full NP object* by leftward movement of the main verb; but then it remains a mystery that such movement is (almost) excluded when the object is a pronoun.

Sentences of the (rare) type *object(s) - auxiliary/modal verb - main verb* could, in principle, be derived either from an OV-base with verb raising (and right adjunction to the auxiliary/modal verb, see Haegeman and van Riemsdijk 1986, van Kemenade 1987, Pintzuk 1991) or from a VO-base by movement of the object to the left (Sigurðsson 1988). I think there are both theoretical and empirical arguments for choosing the first possibility.

First, such leftward movement of an object is reminiscent of 'Object Shift' (Holmberg 1986, Bobaljik and Jonas 1996); but Object Shift is impossible unless the main verb has moved out of the VP, which is clearly not the case in these examples.[13] It is of course possible that Old Icelandic had a leftward movement rule similar to the modern Object Shift, but different in that it could also apply in sentences with the main verb in situ; but this is rather unlikely for theoretical reasons. Second, the objects in this construction are sometimes indefinite; and indefinite objects usually do not move leftward (see Jonas and Bobaljik 1996, for instance).[14]

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[13] This is a clear generalization, and it is immaterial here what lies behind it; for a promising account, see Jonas and Bobaljik (1996). Admittedly, some OV-orders still occur in Modern Icelandic, cf. Rögnvaldsson (1987). In all such examples, however, the preverbal object is quantifier-like, consisting of or containing words like *enginn* 'noone', etc.; cf. (ia). Sentences like (ib), however, are completely ungrammatical in Modern Icelandic:

(i) a. Ég hef engan séð.
       I have noone seen
       'I haven't seen anyone.'

    b. *Ég hef hann séð.
       I have him seen
       'I have seen him.'

[14] Cf. Hróarsdóttir (1996:109-110): 'But it would indeed be very interesting to know whether OV-order can be explained in this way from a uniform VO-base; i.e. whether there has been a rule in Old(er) Icelandic moving definite objects to the left (overtly) and postponing the leftward

3.3 The implication of non-existing patterns

Furthermore, assuming a uniform base for all sentences (be it VO or OV) does not explain the different frequency of the patterns in (7)-(10), or the nonexistence of certain logically possible patterns.[15] When we look closer at these patterns, an interesting generalization emerges. It turns out that all the possibilities where the auxiliary/modal verb precedes the main verb (either immediately or with one or two intervening objects) do exist. However, things look different when we turn to the patterns where the main verb precedes the auxiliary/modal verb. This is shown in (21)-(22):

(21) *Existing patterns with the main verb preceding the auxiliary/modal verb:*
    a. (= (9c)) V_{main} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{DO}
    b. (= (9e)) NP_{DO} - V_{main} - $V_{aux/mod}$
    c. (= (10e)) V_{main} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO}
    d. (= (10h)) NP_{IO} - V_{main} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{DO}
    e. (= (10j)) NP_{IO} - NP_{DO} - V_{main} - $V_{aux/mod}$
    f. (= (10m)) NP_{DO} - V_{main} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{IO}

(22) *Non-existing patterns with the main verb preceding the auxiliary/modal verb:*
    a. (= (9f)) V_{main} - NP_{DO} - $V_{aux/mod}$
    b. (= (9n)) V_{main} - NP_{IO} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{DO}
    c. (= (10o)) V_{main} - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO} - $V_{aux/mod}$
    d. (= (10p)) V_{main} - NP_{DO} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_{IO}

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movement of indefinite objects until LF.' It is clear that no such rule existed in Old Icelandic, at least; indefinite objects are often found in preverbal position, and definite object often follow the main verb.

[15] Hróarsdóttir (1996:111) challenges the validity of this argument; she writes:

> It is also important to notice that in VPs with multiple complements, mixed order is more common than pure, at least in the nineteenth century corpus [...]. Rögnvaldsson's comparison of the frequency of mixed and pure OV-orders is therefore probably not a valid argument.

It is important to notice here that Hróarsdóttir bases her refutation on her nineteenth century corpus, but not on the Old Icelandic texts that I was analyzing. Since OV-order is disappearing in the period that she is investigating, it is not surprising that mixed order is more common than pure. On the contrary; I think this is exactly what one could expect, in a period of change. But the relative frequency of mixed and pure patterns cannot be carried over to Old Icelandic; and hence, I still think my argument is valid.

e. (= (10q)) NP_{IO} - V_{main} - NP_{DO} - $V_{aux/mod}$
f. (= (10r)) NP_{DO} - V_{main} - NP_{IO} - $V_{aux/mod}$

It is not difficult to see the difference between the existing patterns in (21) and the non-existing in (22); in (21), the two non-finite verbs are adjacent, whereas in all of the patterns in (22), one or both objects intervene between them. Thus, the patterns in (23) are allowed in Old Icelandic, whereas (24) is disallowed ($NP_0^2 =$ two, one or zero NPs).

(23) a. NP_0^2 - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_0^2 - V_{main} - NP_0^2
 b. NP_0^2 - V_{main} - $V_{aux/mod}$ - NP_0^2

(24) * V_{main} - NP - $V_{aux/mod}$

This is interesting, since (24) is disallowed in Old English as well (Pintzuk 1991:166-167). This suggests that Old Icelandic and Old English should be described along the same lines; and since Pintzuk (1991) has presented strong arguments for the hypothesis that Old English had a variable OV-VO-base, these similarities between the two languages lend further support to the claim that Old Icelandic also had variable base in the VP.[16]
    The patterns found with particle verbs further support this:

(25) *Sentences with a non-finite verb, a particle, and one (or two) object(s):*

 a. Nú hafðieinn þeirra Skrælingja *tekið upp* öxi eina.
    now had one of-them barbarians taken up axe one
    'Now one of the barbarians had picked up an axe.'
                                                    (Grænlendinga saga, p. 1106)

 b. Þar mundi eg hafa *gefið* þér *upp* eina sök ...
    there would I have given you up one sin
    'I would have forgiven you one sin ...'
                                                    (Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða, p. 1400)

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[16] It is not clear to me how to account for those patterns in (8)-(10) above where the auxiliary/modal verb precedes the main verb, but one or both objects intervene between the non-finite verbs. Several possibilities come to mind, but the examples are so few that it is difficult or impossible to find reliable tests to choose among these possibilities. It must be pointed out that in almost all of these cases the intervening objects are pronouns, and in the modern Scandinavian languages, pronouns do not obey the same constraints with respect to Object Shift as full NPs do (cf. Holmberg 1986; Bobaljik and Jonas 1996). Thus, I (tentatively) suggest that something related to the modern Object Shift is at stake in these examples; but more research is obviously needed to confirm that.

c. Hvenær skaltu *upp taka* slíkan ágætisgrip?
   when   shall-you up   take such   marvellous thing?
   'When are you going to wear such a marvellous piece.'

(Laxdæla saga, p. 1608)

d. Þeir kváðust aldrei vilja sína eigu   *upp gefa.*
   they said   never will REFL property up   give
   'They said they would never hand over their property.'

(Sturlu saga, p. 97)

(26) *Sentences with a non-finite verb, a particle, and one (or two) object(s) (= (25)):*

		(XP) -	V_{fin}	-	V_{main}	-	PRT	-	NP_{DO}
a.		(XP) -	V_{fin}	-	V_{main}	-	PRT	-	NP_{DO}
b.		(XP) -	V_{fin}	-	V_{main}	-	NP_{DO}	-	PRT
c.		(XP) -	V_{fin}	-	PRT	-	V_{main}	-	NP_{DO}
d.		(XP) -	V_{fin}	-	NP_{DO}	-	PRT	-	V_{main}
e.	*	(XP) -	V_{fin}	-	PRT	-	NP_{DO}	-	V_{main}
f.	*	(XP) -	V_{fin}	-	NP_{DO}	-	V_{main}	-	PRT

The patterns in (26a), (26c) and (26d) are all very common; (26b) is very rare, and (26e-f) do not seem to exist. If we assume, as is usually done, that the verb and the particle are base-generated as adjacent, with the order *verb - particle* in a VO-base but *particle -verb* in an OV-base, (26a) and (26d) show pure VO- and OV-order, respectively. (26c) could be analyzed as OV with postposing of the object, cf. above.

   The nonexistence of (26e) is presumably predicted, regardless of the different possibilities in the base. Given VO-base, (26e) would have to be derived either by rightward movement of the main verb over the particle and the object, or by leftward movement of both the object and the particle over the main verb; neither possibility looks feasible. Given OV-base, (26e) would have to be derived by leftward movement of the particle over the object, which does not look feasible either.

   On the other hand, the nonexistence of (26f) is not predicted given VO-base. An analysis which assumes that Old Icelandic was uniformly VO must crucially rely on leftward movement of objects to derive the common pattern in (26d). But if the object is moved leftward in (26d), it is not clear why it can not also be moved leftward in (26f). Actually, one could expect (26f) to be more common than (26d), since the derivation of (26f) would only involve one movement, whereas both the object and the particle would have to be moved in (26d).

   Another possible derivation of (26d), given VO-base, would be to assume that both the verb and the particle are moved to the right, over the object. But if such

movement is possible, we would not have any explanation for the nonexistence of (26e). We might in fact expect (26e) to be more common than (26d), since the derivation of (26e) would only involve one movement, whereas both the verb and the particle would be moved in (26d).

Thus, I conclude that the distribution of main verbs, particles, and pronominal objects lends strong support to the claim that both VO and OV were possible base orders in the VP in Old Icelandic.

3.4 An unspecified parameter?

In the preceding section, I showed that arguments for both OV- and VO-base can be found in Old Icelandic. If we were forced to choose either OV or VO as a base for all Old Icelandic sentences, this would be a tough choice. But fortunately, there is a third alternative, as mentioned in the Introduction. In the last few years, it has been proposed by several people that variable word order may be best accounted for by assuming synchronic variation in phrase structure, instead of postulating one single basic order and letting extensive movement rules account for the variation. This idea has been fruitfully applied to the history of languages such as Old English (Kroch 1989, Pintzuk 1991) and Yiddish (Santorini 1989, 1992).[17]

But what does such 'synchronic variation in phrase structure' really mean? As mentioned above, it is usually assumed that the differences between OV- and VO-base can be attributed to different settings of the head parameter (final vs. initial). If we claim that some sentences in Old Icelandic must be derived from an OV-base,

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[17] In fact, Kossuth (1978b) claims that Old Icelandic had mixed basic order in the VP, although it is difficult to translate her analysis into a more 'modern' framework (she is, for instance, counting Stylistic Fronting in relative clauses as instances of OV-order). Sigurðsson (1994) also suggested that speakers of Old Icelandic could choose between two phrase structure rules for the VP; one of these rules would have given OV-order, but the other VO-order. Later, however, Sigurðsson (1988:15-16) discusses the possibility of different phrase structure rules:

> [...] it is at least pre-theoretically possible that [Old Icelandic] had no basic order of constituents within the VP [...]. This is equivalent with saying that verbs were able to govern bidirectionally in Old Icelandic (or Old Scandinavian). I do not find the idea feasible. It is not compatible with the parametric approach to government directionality and basic word order change [...]. Also, it raises the question why verbs should have been able to govern bidirectionally in Old Icelandic as opposed to Modern Icelandic [...].

This is of course not really an argument against assuming differences in phrase structure; especially not in the light of the recent studies mentioned above. In fact, what Sigurðsson is talking about here is not quite the same as he proposed in his thesis (1994). One thing is to say that Old Icelandic had **no** basic order at all within the VP, as Faarlund (1990) claims, and quite another thing is to say that it had no **single** basic word order.

whereas others are derived from a VO-base, we seem to be facing a dilemma. How can a binary parameter have two values in the same language; be both plus and minus? Note that there is abundant evidence for variation at the individual level; the same speakers must have mastered both OV- and VO-order. But claiming that a binary parameter could have both values in the grammar of individual speakers seems to be equivalent to denying that the parameter existed at all.

It seems to me that the simplest and most natural solution is to say that the head parameter did not in fact have two values in Old Icelandic; instead, it had no value at all -it was unspecified. We can draw a parallel from phonological features, for instance. In Icelandic, /f/ and /v/ are distinctive in initial position, but in medial position, they are in complementary distribution; [v] before voiced sounds, [f] before voiceless sounds. Thus, what we get phonetically is either a voiced or a voiceless sound; but there is really no compelling reason to speculate whether the underlying phoneme has the feature [+voice] or [-voice] (or some equivalent combination of laryngeal features). It is most natural to assume that the underlying phoneme is simply a labiodental fricative, unspecified for voicing; but since a speech sound (in contrast to an underlying phoneme) must be either voiced or voiceless, the actual sound we produce and hear will be voiced or voiceless, depending on the following sound.

I can see no reason why syntactic parameters could not also be left unspecified. One of the major tasks in first language acquisition is fixing the parameters, which must be assumed to be unspecified when acquisition begins; children assign values to the parameters according to the language of the speech community. But UG could allow for the possibility of some parameters being left unspecified, due to the lack of necessary and crucial data that would allow children to set the parameters. It is not difficult to imagine that the data that children learning Old Icelandic had access to did not allow them to fix the value of the head parameter.

But just as in the phonology example above, there is no contradiction in talking about OV-base and VO-base, and at the same time claiming that the head parameter was unspecified. Just as every speech sound must be either voiced or voiceless, every phrase must be either head-initial or head-final; there are two possibilities, and one of them must be chosen, but the crucial point is that the choice is not predetermined (cf., however, section 3.4 below).

The examples in (3)-(6) above show that the order of post-Infl constituents could differ widely. Thus, given that there exists a head parameter (or directionality parameter of government), it seems reasonable to assume that children would have had difficulties in setting the value of that parameter. In this respect, there do not seem to be any differences between main and subordinate clauses (even though it is possible that children rely mainly on main clauses, cf. Lightfoot 1991).

The frequency of Stylistic Fronting may also have made it more difficult for language learners to fix the value of the head parameter. Even though Stylistic Fronting is still perfectly grammatical and frequent in Modern Icelandic, it is often

not applied where it could have been used. This contrasts sharply with many earlier texts, where it seems that Stylistic Fronting is almost always applied if at all possible. This results in a very high frequency of surface OV-order, especially in relative clauses like the following (cf. also Kossuth 1978b):

(27) a.   ... sveinninn ...   heilsar þeim vel er   *komnir* *voru.*
          boy-the   greets   them well that   come   was
          '... the boy greets well those who had come.'

(Hænsna-Þóris saga, p. 1420)

   b. Sá   fór   er   *sendur   var…*
       that went that   sent   was ...
       'The one who was sent went away ...'   *(Króka-Refs saga, p. 1518)*

   I conclude that there are both empirical and theoretical reasons for favoring the variable base analysis over the single base (OV or VO) analysis. We can assume that during the centuries when OV- and VO-orders cooccur, both with considerable frequency, language learners could not fix the value of the head parameter, which thus remained unspecified, which in turn lead to the continuing generation of both OV- and VO-orders. Only when a great majority of sentences came to have VO-order, language learners began to fix the value of the parameter, and OV-order became extinct in a relatively short time (cf. section 4.1 below).

3.5 Base-generation and movement

The choice between [f] and [v] in the example above depends on the environment, and there are reasons to believe that the choice between OV- and VO-order does so too; to some extent, at least. Note that in the 'typical' OV-sentence, the object is pronominal, whereas in the 'typical' VO-sentence, the object is a full NP (see Sigurðsson 1988:30). In sentences with only one non-finite verb, this could be accommodated with both OV- and VO-base; in an OV-base, we would have to assume that full NPs are moved to the right, whereas in a VO-base, pronominal object would be moved to the left. Sigurðsson (1988:31) points out that 'leftward movement of pronominal objects [...] is a well attested phenomenon in many VO languages', and also that '[r]ightward movements of non-pronominal objects, especially indefinite or heavy objects, are also widely attested, in both VO and OV languages'.

   But the issue is actually more complex, as we see when we look at sentences with two non-finite verbs. It is clear that the order *pronominal object - main verb - auxiliary/modal verb* is much more frequent than the order *pronominal object - auxiliary/modal verb - main verb*; and the order *auxiliary/modal verb - main verb*

- full NP object is more frequent than the order *main verb - auxiliary/modal verb - full NP object*. Thus, it appears that the nature of the object (pronominal vs. full NP) to some extent determines the relative order of the auxiliary/modal verb and the main verb. This is not expected given either a pure OV-base or a pure VO-base.

However, if we assume that the head parameter was unspecified for the VP, I think this situation is quite natural. Note that I am claiming that the different distribution of pronominal objects vs. full NP objects can in most cases be attributed to differences in the base, whereas in some cases it must be attributed to the application of movement rules, which have either moved a pronominal object leftward or a full NP object rightwards. This might be considered a serious drawback. However, I do not think that it is, given certain assumptions.

Under the 'traditional' generative conception of the interplay between the syntax and the lexicon (cf. especially Chomsky 1981), it would be difficult to explain that sentences with pronominal objects tend to have pure OV-order, whereas sentences with full NP objects tend to have pure VO-order. It is assumed in 'classical' generative grammar that words are taken from the lexicon and inserted into ready-made sentence structures. This means that the nature of the object (pronominal vs. full NP) should not be able to have any effect on the base, since the basic order is determined prior to lexical insertion.

This appears to favor the movement analysis; and leftward movement of pronouns and rightward movement of full NPs is well motivated anyway, as repeatedly pointed out above. However, a movement analysis of the positioning of objects does not explain that the verbs tend to follow; that is, if a pronominal object is fronted, the order of the non-finite verbs is usually *main verb - auxiliary/modal verb*; and conversely, if a full NP follows the verbal cluster, the most usual order is *auxiliary/modal verb - main verb*.

I think that assuming the 'Minimalist Program' (Chomsky 1993) might solve these problems. In the Minimalist framework, it is no longer assumed that words are inserted into ready-made structures. Instead, it is assumed that sentences are built up gradually, in a bottom-up manner. This means that structure-building and lexical insertion are no longer two distinct processes; when the order of the verb and the object is decided, we already have information on the nature of the object.

This makes it understandable that the base order can be more or less determined by the nature of the object. Given that structure-building starts at the bottom, as pointed out above, the first elements that are combined are the main verb and the object; and if the object is pronominal, it will tend to precede the verb. Given the reasonable assumption that all the VPs in each clause must agree in headedness, this entails that at the next level, the complement of a non-finite auxiliary/modal verb (i.e., the main verb and its object) will precede it. Thus, this approach explains that pure word order patterns are more common than mixed ones; and it also explains how the nature of the object can determine not only the derived word order of the

VP, but also its basic order.[18]

4. Concluding remarks

4.1 Some speculations on the loss of OV-order

As mentioned above, OV-order remains relatively frequent until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when it disappears in the course of only a few decades, as evidenced by Hróarsdóttir's (1995) detailed study. Hróarsdóttir (1996) suggests that this change, together with the disappearance of *pro* and the introduction of the expletive, was due to a morphological change (albeit not an overt one); the N-feature in SpecAgrOP became weak, and hence became unable to cause syntactic movement of the object. If this explanation could be connected to some changes in the overt morphology, it might be a promising one; but as far as I know, no such changes can be demonstrated to have occurred.[19]

We must also keep in mind that the leftward movement of the object is only a part of the story; leftward movement of non-finite verbs also disappears at the same time. It is not obvious that weakening of N-features can be invoked there. Hróarsdóttir (1996:132) mentions 'the relevant features of the non-finite-verb position', but does not say anything about the nature of these features. If movement is always caused by the presence of strong features, it is clear that the strength of the features that cause object movement and those that cause movement of non-finite verbs does not have to match, since mixed word order does exist. Since these two types of features thus seem to be independent of each other, it is suspicious that both should change at the same time in the history of the language, after having been optionally weak or strong for several centuries.

Therefore, I will stick to the claim made in section 3.4 above, that the head parameter simply was not set for the VP in Old Icelandic. Then we would conclude

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[18] By this, I am in fact claiming that there exists a set of pragmatic or discourse-governed principles (a 'pragmatic component', if you like), that is similar to Baker's conception of the morphological component, in that 'they constitute their own semi-independent component of the grammar, and as such, they may constrain representations at any or all levels of description' (Baker 1988:428-429).

[19] Note furthermore that the presumed change is **not** the introduction of weak features, but the disappearance of strong features; the weak and strong features must be assumed to have coexisted in the language prior to the change, to explain the optionality in word order. This means that even if the first traces of a change in the overt morphology would be found around 1800, they could not be used as an argument for a change in the abstract feature system. If a certain overt change was claimed to reflect the weakening of the relevant abstract features, that change would be expected to have started already in Old Icelandic.

that around or shortly after 1800, the relative frequency of VO-order compared to OV-order had become high enough to make it possible for children to set the value of the parameter to head-initial. But then of course, a very important question suggests itself: What caused this drop in frequency of OV-order, which in turn led to its complete disappearance?

The present state of research does not allow me to answer this question with any certainty, but a few speculations are in order. First, we must remember that a great majority of all clauses had VO-order on the surface all the time, due to the application of V-to-I movement. It is not unlikely that this may eventually have initiated the change in the VP. I will also tentatively suggest that three other important syntactic changes in the history of Icelandic contributed to the change in the VP. These changes are, first, a significant drop in the frequency of Stylistic Fronting; second, the introduction of the expletive subject *það*; and third, the disappearance of null arguments. Let us now look at these changes in turn.

As pointed out above, Stylistic Fronting is responsible for many surface OV-orders, even in Modern Icelandic. One reason for the dramatic drop in the frequency of Stylistic Fronting is that it just is not always applied where it could be applied, as pointed out above.[20] Another reason is the introduction of the expletive subject *það*, which is usually assumed to be nonexistent in Old Icelandic.[21] Stylistic Fronting and *það* are incompatible, so when *það* is used more and more often, the frequency of Stylistic Fronting is bound to drop. It is difficult to trace the origin of the expletive *það* from written sources, but its frequency as an expletive subject does not appear to rise remarkably until the first part of the nineteenth century (cf. Hróarsdóttir 1995, 1996). Even in Modern Icelandic written prose, the expletive *það* is relatively rare, compared to its high frequency in the spoken language.[22]

Another important change appears to happen almost simultaneously with the word

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[20] In Modern Icelandic, Stylistic Fronting is impossible unless the clause contains a 'subject gap' (cf. Maling 1990). This means that fronting of participles and infinitives is impossible if the clause has an overt definite subject. In Old Icelandic, however, we find several examples of fronted participles and infinitives in clauses with pronominal subjects. This shows that either the subject gap condition did not apply in Old Icelandic, or else the definition of subject gap has changed; in either case, the domain of Stylistic Fronting has been narrowed. This means that it became easier for children to find out the order of elements in the VP.

[21] The oldest unequivocal examples of expletive *það* I have found are in stories that were translated from English around 1500. Quite a few examples are also found in the first Icelandic translation of *The New Testament*, from 1540. However, such examples are very rare in texts from the next two centuries.

[22] In the written norm, there is great tendency to use topicalization or Stylistic Fronting, or even Narrative Inversion, instead of *það*. This is actually recommended in schools and in (prescriptive) grammars of Modern Icelandic; thus, for instance, Smári (1920:19) states explicitly that expletive *það* should be avoided.

order change. This is the disappearance of referential *pro*, which had also remained quite stable from the earliest texts until the eighteenth century at least (cf. Hjartardóttir 1993; Sigurðsson 1993), but disappeared in the beginning of the nineteenth century (cf. Hróarsdóttir 1995, 1996). It is tempting to suggest that these changes were related in some way. In a preliminary study I have made of several texts from the first half of the nineteenth century, it appears that those authors who do not use OV-order also do not use referential *pro*. This indicates that there is a connection between these features.

Sigurðsson (1993) has recently argued that in Old Icelandic, *pro* was identified by means of free indexing; it had to be coreferential with a preceding overt NP, which was allowed to c-command *pro* but did not have to do so. Sigurðsson claims that Icelandic lost this possibility of identification under free indexing around 1800. If we accept this, we must ask how this could be connected to the loss of OV-order at approximately the same time.

It does not seem unreasonable to suggest that when *pro*-drop, especially object-drop, was still possible and relatively frequent, it was much more difficult for language learners to fix the value of the head parameter; speakers had no way of figuring out the place of the object in the structure. But when all arguments of the verb began to appear obligatorily on the surface (due to the loss of free indexing as an identification strategy), it became easier for children learning the language to fix the value of the directionality parameter. This would be in accordance with the fact that OV-order seems to disappear a little later than referential *pro*.[23]

4.2 Summary and conclusion

The main conclusions of the paper can be summarized as follows:

(25) a. The majority of the logically possible word order patterns actually occurs in the VP in Old Icelandic; however, it is clear Old Icelandic was configurational, and the VP existed as a syntactic constituent.

b. Because of the frequency and stability of OV-order, together with the distribution of pronominal objects and particles, it is not feasible to assume that the VP in Old Icelandic was uniformly either head-initial or head-final.

c. By assuming that the head parameter was unspecified, we can account for the great majority of all Old Icelandic sentences without positing any movement of constituents of the VP; this appears to be the most natural

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[23] Alleged connections between basic word order and *pro*-drop are of course well known; cf., for instance, Adams (1987). However, it is not immediately obvious that such analyses can be applied to the history of Icelandic (cf. also Hróarsdóttir 1996); but more research is obviously needed before anything can be concluded about this.

way of accounting for the variation.

d. The 'Minimalist' conception of structure-building and lexical insertion makes it natural to assume that the same word order principles apply to base-generated structures and to structures derived by syntactic movement.

e. Free word order and many instances of empty categories make it seem a reasonable assumption that children would have had difficulties in fixing the value of the head parameter.

f. When the frequency of Stylistic Fronting dropped, the expletive subject *það* was introduced, and pro-drop became ungrammatical, more and more sentences came to have surface VO-order.

g. Around 1800, the VO-order had become so dominant that children could begin to set the head parameter to 'initial' and as a result, OV-sentences disappeared from the language in a relatively short time in the first half of the nineteenth century.

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