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RIGHTWARD DISPLACEMENT OF NPs IN ICELANDIC:
FORMAL AND FUNCTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

0. Introduction

In this paper I will look at two rules of Icelandic syntax; Indefinite NP Postposing (INPP) and Heavy NP Shift (HNPS). These rules can be exemplified by (1) and (2), respectively:

- (1)a Maður er í dyrunum
'A man is in the doorway'
b Það er maður í dyrunum
'There is a man in the doorway'
- (2)a Ég gaf gamla manninum sem ég hitti á spítalanum bókina
'I gave the old man whom I met at the hospital the book'
b Ég gaf bókina gamla manninum sem ég hitti á spítalanum
'I gave the book (to) the old man whom I met at the hospital'

Thus, INPP is usually assumed to move indefinite subject NPs to the right (followed by insertion of the dummy það in subject position), and HNPS is assumed to move "heavy" (roughly, long or complex) nonsubject NPs to the right.¹

The paper falls into two main parts. In the first, the formal characteristics of the rules are described. A movement analysis of them is defended, against a base-generated account. It is shown that, contrary to the usual assumptions, each rule moves both subjects and objects.

In the second part, I look closer at the function of the rules; why "indefiniteness" and "heaviness" make it possible to postpose NPs. I find that really the same feature characterizes all NPs that can be postposed; it must be possible to interpret them as carrying new information. I conclude that INPP and HNPS can and should be subsumed under one rule.

1. Form

1.1 INPP and There-insertion

It is sometimes said that INPP "is the Icelandic equivalent of There-insertion in English" (Maling 1980:181n), but that is only partly true. In English, There-insertion only applies to a limited number of verbs (Zaenen 1980:95), but INPP in Icelandic applies to all sorts of verbs, transitive as well as intransitive (cf. Maling & Zaenen 1978:483, Thráinsson 1979:473). Let us take some examples:²

- (3)a Margt fólk kom í veisluna
'Many people came to the party'
b Það kom margt fólk í veisluna
'There came many people to the party'
- (4)a Einhverjir strákar brutu gluggann
'Some boys broke the window'
b Það brutu einhverjir strákar gluggann
'There broke some boys the window'

As the name of the English rule indicates, the word there usually stands in initial position instead of the postposed

subject. In Icelandic, on the other hand, the dummy það (which is also used in extraposition sentences) is not needed when some other NP or PP is fronted. The function of það appears to be only to satisfy some kind of a Verb-Second constraint (cf. Maling & Zaenen 1978, Maling 1980), as it never shows up unless the verb would else be in first position. Thus, we can get (5) instead of (3)b:

- (5) Í veisluna kom margt fólk
'To the party came many people'

It could be claimed, of course, that (5) is not a case of INPP, but rather simple inversion of the subject and the finite verb; after all, such inversion is obligatory when some phrase other than the subject is fronted. However, this account breaks down when we observe that an indefinite subject need not end up immediately following the verb, as it does by inversion; its "landing site" can be at various places in surface structure, as the following examples show:

- (6)a Gamall maður hefur komið hingað í dag
'An old man has come here today'
b Það hefur gamall maður komið hingað í dag
'There has an old man come here today'
c Það hefur komið gamall maður hingað í dag
d Það hefur komið hingað gamall maður í dag
e Það hefur komið hingað í dag gamall maður

The main restriction on the landing site seems to be that it can not be inside a phrase (with the exception of VP, which is one of the reasons for my claim that VP does not exist in

Icelandic, see Rögnvaldsson, forthcoming). The rule also observes Ross' (1967) constraints on rightward movement.³

Now note that instead of inserting það in subject position in sentences (6)b-e, we can front either the place adverbial hingað 'here' or the PP í dag 'today'. Thus we get sentences like (7)a-b, for example:

- (7)a Hingað hefur komið gamall maður í dag
'Here has come an old man today'
b Í dag hefur komið hingað gamall maður
'Today has come here an old man'

In sentences like these, simple inversion is excluded. When the subject moves farther to the right than to a place immediately after the verb, it has to fulfill the same conditions of "indefiniteness" as if það were put in its place:

- (8)a *Það hefur komið gamli maðurinn hingað í dag
'There has come the old man here today'
b *Hingað hefur komið gamli maðurinn í dag
'Here has come the old man today'

It is also to be noted that INPP is not limited to subjects; the postposing of objects, as in (9), seems to be governed by the same principles. An indefinite object can be moved over several adverbials, as in (9)b, but a definite object can't, as (9)c shows:

- (9)a Ég sá einhvern mann þarna í gær
'I saw some man there yesterday'
b Ég sá þarna í gær einhvern mann
'I saw there yesterday some man'

c *Ég sá þarna í gær hann
'I saw there yesterday him'

1.2 Arguments for a movement rule

It has recently been claimed by Bresnan (1982) that There-insertion in English is not a movement rule, and that There is the real subject of sentences with an "extra" indefinite NP immediately following the finite verb. She calls this "extra" NP an object, and claims that it is base-generated in the position where it appears in surface structure.

This solution may work in English, but it seems to be inapplicable in Icelandic for several reasons. First, it would require the doubling of all subcategorization frames, because verbs could only take an "extra object" when það is the subject (cf. Thráinsson 1979:167-170 for a similar argument against an "Intraposition" analysis of extraposed sentences). Second, it would have to be possible to base-generate the "extra object" at various places in the predicate, as (6)b-e show. This would cost many new phrase-structure rules. Third, it is not clear what to do with sentences like (7), where a PP (or an NP other than the subject) occupies the subject slot, but the "extra" NP does not immediately follow the verb, so that simple inversion can not be involved. Fourth, this "extra object" obligatorily triggers reflexivization within a clause, just as subjects do but objects don't (cf. Thráinsson 1979:289-292).

Fifth, it would have to be explained why the "extra object" always gets the same case as a subject NP preceding the verb would have. Usually this is the nominative (note

that in Icelandic objects are usually accusative, and also dative or genitive, but not nominative); but when the verb takes an oblique subject (acc., dat., or gen.), as the "impersonal" verbs do,⁴ its "extra object" has the same oblique case:

- (10)a Öllum fannst myndin góð
'Everybody (dat.) found the film good'
b Það fannst öllum myndin góð
'There found everybody (dat.) the film good'
- (11)a Engan vantaði bókina
'Nobody (acc.) needed the book'
b Það vantaði engan bókina
'There needed nobody (acc.) the book'

Assuming these objections against a base-generated account could be overcome, there remains one argument, which Bresnan (1982) considers to be her strongest against a movement analysis. In a certain dialect of English, the number of the verb be depends on the number of the first conjunct in an immediately following coordinate structure:

- (12) There $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} *were \\ was \end{array} \right\}$ a man and three women here

On the other hand, the verb always stands in the plural if a coordinate structure precedes it; i.e., it then takes its number from the entire coordinate structure, but not from one of its conjuncts. If the first (or only) NP immediately following the verb is plural, the verb will also be:

- (13) There $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} *was \\ were \end{array} \right\}$ three women (and a man) here

"This dialect provides excellent evidence in favor of the base generation of there constructions ...", says Bresnan (1982), because a paradox in rule ordering is bound to appear. If number agreement precedes There-insertion, (13) can be derived, but not (12); if There-insertion precedes number agreement, the situation is reverse, Bresnan states.

When we look at Icelandic, the situation is much the same. I think, however, that the plural form of the verb is possible in sentences like (12), but the singular is much preferred:

- (14) Það {[?]komu (pl.)
kom (sg.)} karlmaður og þrjár konur hingað
'There came a man and three women here'

Number agreement with the entire NP is obligatory if it precedes the verb, just as in English:

- (15) Þrjár konur og karlmaður {^{*}kom (sg.)
komu (pl.)} hingað
'Three women and a man came here'

However, this does not prove that INPP can not be a movement rule in Icelandic. Bresnan (1982) seems to assume that a verb can only agree in number with an NP immediately preceding it. But Thráinsson (1979:466) has shown that verbs can also agree in number with predicate NPs in the nominative, as (16) shows:

- (16) Þetta (sg.) {^{*}er (sg.)
eru (pl.)} hestar (pl.)
'This are horses'

In (16), þetta is definitely the subject, but not hestar; and

there is no reason to assume that hestar has at any point in the derivation preceded the verb; yet it triggers agreement. This seems to show that the interaction of verb agreement and subject postposing can not be used to prove anything about rule ordering in Icelandic syntax. Hence, Bresnan's (1982) arguments against a movement analysis fail in Icelandic.

1.3 Postposing of subjects by HNPS

Now let's turn to HNPS. The classic treatment of the rule is Ross (1967), who observed that length is not the only factor determining whether or not postposing of an object is possible; "complex" NPs (containing a PP or a sentence) appear to be easier to postpose than equally long NPs with a "flat" structure (such as coordinate NPs). But, as Ross (1967:28) notes,

The whole problem area of what NP are felt to be "heavy" or "complex" borders on questions of style, and there seems to be a baffling array of dialectal, or possibly even idiolectal, variations here.

This seems to be the case in Icelandic, too; we come back to this problem in the second part of the paper. What matters now is Postal's (1974) statement that the rule doesn't move subjects. He illustrated this with sentences like:

- (17)a All of the men who recovered from mononucleosis
are happy
- b *Are happy all of the men who recovered from mono-
nucleosis

At first, this principle appears to hold in Icelandic also;

cf. (18)b:

- (18)a Strákurinn sem barnaði Maríu í fyrra er flúinn
 'The guy who made Mary pregnant last year has run away'
 b *Er flúinn strákurinn sem barnaði Maríu í fyrra
 'Has run away the guy who made Mary pregnant last year'

But remember that Icelandic usually disallows a finite verb in initial position in declarative sentences. If we insert the dummy það in the subject position in (18)b, we get (18)c, which is fine:

- (18)c Það er flúinn strákurinn sem barnaði Maríu í fyrra
 'There has run away the guy who made Mary pregnant last year'

This indicates that it is not the postposing itself which is disallowed; rather, it is the Verb-Second constraint that must not be broken.

Sentences like (18)b can also be saved in another way. Note that verb first word order is common in (certain styles of) Icelandic written prose to mark discourse continuity or something like that (see Kossuth 1981). It is usually impossible to start a discourse or begin a written text with verb first order; and hence speakers presented with sentences like (18)b, out of context, will not accept them. But if we have a deictic time adverbial following the verb, it shows that the sentence is not the beginning of a text or a discourse. Therefore, sentences like (18)d, with a postposed "heavy" subject and verb first word order, are accepted, without any dummy in subject position:

- (18)d Er þá flúinn strákurinn sem barnaði Maríu í fyrra
'Has then run away the guy who made Mary pregnant
last year'

We can, of course, continue to maintain that HNPS does apply to subjects, and that there is some other rule responsible for the postposing in (18)c-d. But as these rules would be identical, except that the new rule applies only to subjects, HNPS only to nonsubjects, I can't see the point in making such a distinction. We know that subject postposing rules exist in Icelandic; and we know that a rule of dummy insertion is needed anyway.

As for the arguments for a movement analysis of sentences like (18)c-d, rather than base-generation of the "extra" NP in final position, we can bring forth all the same arguments as for INPP as a movement rule, so I won't recapitulate them here.

2. Function

2.1 Conditions on postposed NPs

As the term "Indefinite" NP Postposing indicates, it is usually considered impossible to postpose definite NPs (unless they are "heavy"). Admittedly, it is rarely stated which NPs are definite and which are not; but it appears that personal pronouns, proper names, and NPs having a definite article are considered definite. Other NPs (i.e., those without a definite article) are thus indefinite, and should be able to get postposed, in contrast with the others.

In fact, the presence or absence of a definite article is sometimes used as a defining feature of whether INPP can have applied, or whether some other rule must be involved (cf. Levin 1981).⁵ Let us look at some sentences where we have postposed NPs which are definite according to the definition given above:

- (19)a Hann er í dyrunum
'He is in the doorway'
b *Það er hann í dyrunum
'There is he in the doorway'
- (20)a Jón kom í veisluna
'John came to the party'
b *Það kom Jón í veisluna
'There came John to the party'
- (21)a Strákarnir brutu gluggann
'The boys broke the window'
b *Það brutu strákarnir gluggann
'There broke the boys the window'

We can compare the b-sentences with (1)b, (3)b, and (4)b, repeated here for convenience:

- (1)b Það er maður í dyrunum
'There is a man in the doorway'
- (3)b Það kom margt fólk í veisluna
'There came many people to the party'
- (4)b Það brutu einhverjir strákar gluggann
'There broke some boys the window'

Thus, the distinction between definite and indefinite NPs

with respect to postposing appears to be well-founded, and in fact inevitable.

2.2 Why indefiniteness?

Now look at the following sentences:

- (22) Það var troðfullur salurinn þegar sýningin hófst
'There was full (of people) the theatre when the performance started'
- (23) Það festist rútan á leiðinni norður
'There got stuck the bus on the way north'
- (24) Það er horfinn allur snjórinn⁶
'There has disappeared all the snow'
- (25) Það skín alltaf sólin
'There shines always the sun'

There is no doubt that, according to the argumentation in the first part of the paper, the underlined NPs salurinn, rútan, allur snjórinn and sólin are the subjects of (22)-(25), respectively; and there is also no doubt that they must have originated in initial position, but have been moved to the right and the dummy það inserted in the subject slot. Yet, they are all definite, so that INPP should be excluded; and they are not particularly heavy, so that HNPS can't be responsible either. Let us therefore take a closer look at the question of definiteness; why should indefinite NPs be easier to postpose than definites? To answer this, we must introduce some principles of functional syntax.

It is a well-known fact that a wide-spread tendency in

many languages is for so-called "new information" to appear relatively late in the sentence. "Old" or "given" information, on the other hand, tends to come early in the sentence. But what is "given" and what is "new"? I quote here Chafe's (1976:30) definition of these two terms:

Given (or old) information is that knowledge which the speaker assumes to be in the consciousness of the addressee at the time of the utterance. So-called new information is what the speaker assumes he is introducing into the addressee's consciousness by what he says.

Chafe (1976) points out, that although givenness and definiteness often go together, these terms must be kept distinct, as there is no one-to-one correspondence between them.

Now we are coming right to the point. We must keep in mind that the usual function of the definite article is anaphoric; i.e., to mark the NPs which have been talked about or mentioned, so as to make it easier for the listener/reader to identify their referents. That is, NPs typically get a definite article by the virtue of having been talked about, and hence being "given" according to Chafe's definition quoted above.

However, this is not the case in (22)-(25). The NPs there need not at all have been talked about. Each NP has only one possible referent, and hence it is natural to use the definite article, even though it is not anaphoric here. In sentence (22), we may assume that the performance has been mentioned before. Therefore, the speaker expects the listener to know which theatre he means, although it has not been mentioned in the discourse; he therefore uses the de-

finite article, although the theatre is "new information".

In (23), there is also enough context in the sentence to make the listener able to identify the referent of the bus; it is of course 'the bus that goes north'. In (24) and (25), there is, of course, no question of "which snow" or "which sun" (cf. also Chafe 1976:39).

2.3 Postposing of "new information"

Thus, we come to the conclusion that all these NPs, although definite, can be interpreted as new, according to Chafe's definition. I would like to propose, then, that we put new instead of indefinite in the characterization of NPs that can be postposed. This means that formal features such as presence or absence of a definite article can no longer be used to predict which NPs can be postposed.

This move has several consequences. One of them is that we would expect it to be possible to postpose proper names, if they can be interpreted as carrying new information in the context in which they appear. This prediction seems to be borne out; imagine, for example, the following sentence spoken in a radio program:

- (26) Það er kominn hingað til okkar í stúdíóið Jón Jónsson, og ...
'There has come here to us in the studio John Johnson, and ...

The listeners do not know who is expected, so that John is not "in their consciousness", and hence can be postposed.

Now what about personal pronouns? They are nearly always anaphoric, and hence must be given, in Chafe's terminology; i.e., if you use a personal pronoun without any explana-

tion, you assume that the listener/reader is already thinking of the referent, and thus will be able to identify him correctly. But if we can make up circumstances where the pronoun can be interpreted as carrying new information, it ought to be possible to postpone it. This can be done by adding some characterization of the one referred to:

- (27) Það er kominn hann þarna nágrenni þinn
'There has come he there your neighbour'

In this sentence, it should be clear what 'he' is referred to, so that it can be interpreted as new and hence postposed.

But perhaps (27) is better thought of as an instance of HNPS; so let's turn to the function of that rule. It seems to me that it is roughly the same as that of INPP. Remember that most "heavy" NPs which get postposed contain either a PP or an S. Usually this PP or S serves to identify or explain further the content of the head NP, as can be seen from the following examples:

- (28) Eg mætti konunni í gráa húsinu í morgun
'I met the woman (who lives) in the grey house this morning'

- (29) Jón hjálpaði gamla karlinum sem öllum bykir vænt um
'John helped the old man who everybody is fond of'

This means that although the head NPs are formally definite, it is not necessary that their referents have been mentioned before. The PP or S makes the listener capable of identifying them; but still they are new information in the sentence. This also explains why it is easier to postpose "complex" NPs than equally long NPs having "flat" structure; in the "flat"

NPs there is no head word which the others serve to explain. Thus, it is much more difficult to interpret a definite noun in a "flat" NP as carrying new information.

2.4 Landing sites of definites

There are some further complications, though. There do not seem to be the same possibilities of "landing sites" for definite NPs which get postposed as for indefinites. The indefinites can end up immediately following the verb, or at any other place in the sentence, provided it is not within a phrase. Definites, on the other hand, can immediately follow the verb only if an NP or PP occupies the subject slot (which presumably is a case of simple inversion). If the dummy það is in subject position, a definite subject must move farther to the right. Sentences like (30)b are thus unacceptable, although (30)c is fine:

- (30)a Glugginn var opinn
'The window was open'
b *Það var glugginn opinn
'There was the window open'
c Það var opinn glugginn
'There was open the window'

What is the reason for this difference? I would like to propose that it lies in how easy it is to imagine a situation where a postposed NP is not given. It is usually much harder to imagine a situation where a definite NP is new than an indefinite NP. Therefore, it is only natural that postposed definite NPs have much more restricted distribution. People

know that pað is a dummy, which can only be inserted in an emptied subject slot, but is not capable of causing subject-verb inversion. Therefore, sentences with pað in subject position and a definite NP immediately following the verb will not be accepted, as the definite NP is in the typical inversion position. But when the definite subject moves farther away from the verb, people can reason in the following way: "Well, the speaker must have a special reason for moving this NP so far to the right. It's obvious that this can't be simple inversion; the NP in question must carry new information." Indefinite NPs, on the other hand, are typically new, so that sentences with indefinites immediately following the verb are readily accepted.

3. Conclusion

I think this case may be typical of the interactions between formal and functional factors which we so often get in syntax. There has been a strong tendency in generative syntax to let the formal factors carry the whole burden of explaining, but I think this is misleading, and hope to have shown here a case where it does not work. But let me stress that I am not denying the importance of formal factors. It is remarkable that leading linguists, both in functional grammar such as Kuno (1980), and in formal generative syntax, such as Chomsky (1981), make clear their opinion that both formal and functional factors have their place in the overall grammatical description.

Notes

¹ INPP in Icelandic has previously been treated by Maling & Zaenen (1978), Maling (1980), Zaenen (1980), and Thráinsson (1979), who also mentions HNPS. For the fullest treatment of the form and function of these rules in Icelandic, see my thesis (Rögnvaldsson 1982a), from which the main body of arguments in this paper is taken.

² Besides being a dummy, það can also be a neuter personal pronoun. Therefore, I have avoided the use of neuter subjects in the examples, so as to exclude the possibility of some kind of anaphoric relation between það and the postposed subject.

³ It is interesting to note that in "raising" sentences, the postposed subject can end up following a "raised" subject:

- (i)a Einhver telur mig hafa verið ríkan
'Somebody believes me to have been rich'
b Það telur mig einhver hafa verið ríkan
'There believes me somebody to have been rich'

This appears to support Thráinsson's (1979) claim that the subject of the subordinate clause has actually been "raised" and now belongs to the main clause.

⁴ Thráinsson (1979) has shown conclusively that these oblique NPs behave syntactically like subjects. Cf. also Rögnvaldsson (1982b).

⁵ In a footnote, Levin acknowledges to "have been informed by Annie Zaenen that definite subjects can undergo indefinite subject postposing under some pragmatically determined circumstances" (1981:48n).

⁶ Postal (1974:83n) cites similar examples with the quantifier all to show that NPs do not always have to be very "heavy" to get moved by HNPS. But why call this HNPS at all?

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