

## QUIRKY SUBJECTS IN ICELANDIC, FAROESE, AND GERMAN – A RELATIONAL ACCOUNT

Andreas Pankau, FU Berlin

### Introduction

Icelandic is well-known for its quirky, that is, non-nominative marked, subjects. In Icelandic, quirky subjects are either lexically determined, cf. (1a), or the result of passivization, cf. (1b).

- (1) a. Jóni líkar þessi bók.                      b. Þeim var hjálpað.  
Jón.DAT likes this book                      they.DAT was helped  
*Jón likes this book.*                              *They were helped.*

I will refer to the former as *lexical quirks*, and to the latter as *passive quirks*. The standard analysis to quirky subjects rests on the idea that both lexical and passive quirks are regular subjects bearing lexical case. This analysis has originally been developed within LFG by Zaenen et al. (1985). It is adopted by LFG up to this day (Schätzle et al. 2015) but has also been influential for HPSG (Bouma 1992; Sag et al. 1992; Müller to app.), GB and Minimalism (Jónsson 1996, 2003; Sigurðsson 1989, 1992; Þráinsson 2007), and Construction Grammar (Barðdal 2006; Barðdal & Eypórsson 2012). The standard analysis captures both that quirky subjects show typical subject properties, like controllability, cf. (2a), and that the case quirky subjects bear is retained under raising, because lexical case cannot be overwritten, cf. (2b).

- (2) a. Jón<sub>i</sub> vonast til að [PRO<sub>i</sub> líka þessi bók.] / [PRO<sub>i</sub> vera hjálpað.]  
Jón.NOM hopes PREP to like this book                      become helped  
*Jón hopes to like this book/to be helped.*
- b. Hann telur Jóni [t<sub>i</sub> líka þessi bók.] / [t<sub>i</sub> hafa verið hjálpað.]  
he.NOM believes Jón.DAT like this book                      have become helped  
*He believes Jón to like this book/have been helped.*

The aim of this talk is to show that the standard analysis is insufficient from a comparative Germanic perspective. It makes wrong predictions for Faroese and offers no account for quirky subject constructions in German. As an alternative, I will argue for a Relational Grammar analysis of quirky subjects. According to this analysis, quirky subjects are initial subjects but final indirect objects (Dziwirek 1994, Harris 1981). I will show that this account coupled with the notion of working term (Perlmutter 1984) captures the different properties of quirky subjects in Icelandic, Faroese, and German.

### Quirky Subjects in Faroese and German

Faroese (Barnes 2001) possesses quirky subjects<sup>1</sup> that pass all subjects test, like controllability, cf. (3).

- (3) a. Mær dámar mjólkina.                      b. Hann<sub>i</sub> royndi at [PRO<sub>i</sub> dáma matin].  
I.DAT likes milk                                      he.NOM tried to like food  
*I like milk.*                                              *He tried to like the food.*

Faroese differs from Icelandic in two ways. First, Faroese does not possess passive quirks, that is, passivized indirect objects appear in the nominative<sup>2</sup> (Þráinsson et al. 2004, §5.4.4), cf. (4).

- (4) √Hann / \*honum bleiv hjálpin.  
he.NOM he.DAT becomes helped  
*He is helped.*

Second, as Barnes (2001) observes, the case quirky subjects bear is not retained under raising in Faroese, cf. (5).

- (5) Hann<sub>i</sub> heldur meg [t<sub>i</sub> dáma mjólkina].  
he.NOM believes I.ACC like milk  
*He believes me to like milk.*

Both differences are unexpected under the standard analysis. As quirky subjects in Faroese pass all subject tests, they should receive the same analysis as the ones in Icelandic. In other words, they should bear lexical case. But then, this case should be retained under raising, contrary to fact.

Quirky subjects in German differ from quirky subjects both in Icelandic and Faroese. First, they pass none of the well-known subject tests, like controllability, cf. (6).

- (6) a. Mir gefällt der Mann.                      b. \* Ich<sub>i</sub> versuche [PRO<sub>i</sub> der Mann zu gefallen].  
I.DAT likes the man                                      I.NOM try the man to like  
*I like the man.*                                              *I try to like the man.*

Second, the ECM-like construction AcI (*accusativus cum infinitivo*) is impossible with quirky subjects, no matter what case the raised nominal bears, but fine with nominative subjects, which change to accusative, cf. (7).

- (7) a. \* Ich sehe ihm / ihn [t<sub>i</sub> der Mann gefallen].  
I.NOM see he.DAT he.ACC the man like

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that quirky subjects in present day Faroese undergo certain changes where quirky subjects are replaced by nominative subjects (Þráinsson et al. 2004, §5.4.2.1 & §7.6.2).

<sup>2</sup> This is a slight but harmless simplification. For not all dative marked objects can be turned into nominative marked subjects under passivization (Þráinsson et al. 2004, §5.4.4). This need not imply that dative case on objects is lexical, but only that there are two types of dative marked objects, only one of which allows passivization. This proposal is in line with the observation by Postal (2010) and Pankau (2013, 231-9) about two types of accusative marked objects in English and German, respectively.

- b. Ich sehe ihn [t<sub>i</sub> den Mann mögen].  
 I.NOM see he.ACC the man like  
*I see that he likes the man.*

Third, although German possesses sentences that superficially resemble passive quirks, they show no subject properties at all and are best analyzed as impersonal passives, cf. (8).

- (8) a. Ihnen wurde geholfen. b. \*Sie<sub>i</sub> hoffen [PRO<sub>i</sub> geholfen zu werden].  
 they.DAT became helped they.NOM hope helped to become  
*They were helped. They hope to be helped.*

Within the standard analysis, two approaches to quirky subjects in German dominate. The first approach denies that they are quirky subjects proper, given their lack of typical subject properties (Sigurðsson 2002, Bayer 2004, Haider 2010). The second approach denies that German fails the relevant subject tests and claims that German is basically identical to Icelandic (Barðdal 2002, 2006; Barðdal & Eypórsón 2003, 2006; Fanselow 2002). Either analysis runs into problems. The first leaves unexplained the overlap between the predicates selecting quirky subjects in Icelandic and those in German. More problematically, it also leaves unexplained that lexical quirks in contrast to the passive like ones from (8) and in contrast to indirect objects show some subject properties. They can be controllers of empty subjects, cf. (9), and controllers of reciprocal pronouns (Barðdal 2002), cf. (10).

- (9) a. √ Mir<sub>i</sub> gefällt das Buch [ohne PRO<sub>i</sub> es gelesen zu haben].  
 I.DAT likes the book without it read to have  
*I like the book without having read it.*  
 b. \* Ich helfe ihm<sub>i</sub> [ohne PRO<sub>i</sub> danach gefragt zu haben].  
 I.NOM help he.DAT without thereafter asked to have  
*I help him without that he asked for that.*  
 c. \* Ihm<sub>i</sub> wird geholfen [ohne PRO<sub>i</sub> danach gefragt zu haben].  
 he.DAT becomes helped without thereafter asked to have  
*He is helped without having asked for it.*

- (10) a. √ Ihnen<sub>i</sub> gefällt es miteinander.  
 they.DAT likes it with.each.other  
*They enjoy each other.*  
 b. \* Ich habe den Ärzten<sub>i</sub> zueinander<sub>i</sub> geraten.  
 I.NOM have the.DAT doctors to.each.other recommended  
*I have recommended the doctors to each other.*  
 c. \* Den Ärzten<sub>i</sub> wurde zueinander<sub>i</sub> geraten.  
 the.DAT doctors became to.each.other recommended  
*The doctors were recommended to each other.*

The second analysis is problematic for two reasons. First, since German and Icelandic do not behave identically, Fanselow (2002) claims that case identity is at work in German, whereas Barðdal (2002, 2006) and Barðdal & Eypórsón (2003, 2006) claim that corpora data indicate that German and Icelandic do behave identically. The case identity proposal cannot be upheld because it does not exclude all problematic cases in German, cf. (11).

- (11) a. √ Ich<sub>i</sub> mag den Mann [ohne PRO<sub>i</sub> die Frau zu mögen].  
 I.NOM like the man without the woman to like  
 b. \* Mir<sub>i</sub> gefällt der Mann [ohne PRO<sub>i</sub> die Frau zu gefallen].  
 I.DAT likes the man without the woman to like  
*I like the man without liking the woman.*

The reliance on corpora data is problematic because, as the authors themselves admit, the majority of German speakers reject these examples, indicating that the corpora data are not representative. Secondly, the second approach predicts that lexical and passive quirks should behave identically. But as the data in (9) and (10) show, this is not the case. Although there seem to be counterexamples to (9), they are only apparent, cf. (12).

- (12) Mir wurde geholfen ohne einen Auftrag erteilen zu müssen.  
 I.DAT was helped without a order place to must  
*I was helped without satisfying the requirement that one has to place an order.*

Such examples do not indicate control by a passive quirky, but illustrate an arbitrarily interpreted PRO in the embedded clause expressing necessity, as the translation indicates. Note that replacing the modal that forces this interpretation in (12) with a perfect auxiliary results in a rather deviant sentence, cf. (13).

- (13) ??? Mir wurde geholfen ohne einen Auftrag erteilt zu haben.  
 I.DAT was helped without a order placed to have  
*I was helped without having placed an order.*

### Analysis

The Relational Grammar (RG) analysis I want to defend rests on two ideas. The first idea is that quirky subjects are part of a structure called INVERSION in Relational Grammar (Harris 1981). According to this idea, quirky subjects are both a subject and an indirect object, but at distinct levels or strata (for a non-transformational

implementation of levels/strata, cf. Johnson & Postal 1980). Ignoring the second, postverbal argument, lexical quirks receive the following uniform analysis according to the inversion analysis.

(14)	<i>Jóni líkar þessi bók</i>	<i>Mær dámar mjólkina</i>	<i>Mir gefällt der Mann</i>
	1	1	1
	3	3	3

The numbers ‘1’ and ‘3’ indicate ‘subject’ and ‘indirect object’, respectively. Their ordering indicates that a lexical quirky is an *initial* subject, but a *final* indirect object. The second idea is the notion of WORKING TERM. Terms in RG comprise 1s, 2s (direct objects), and 3s. A DP is a working term<sub>x</sub> iff it is a term<sub>x</sub> at some level and a term<sub>y</sub> at the final level. Lexical quirks are working 1s: they are a 1 at the initial level and a 3 at the final level. In order to account for the fact that quirky subjects behave differently in the three languages, I propose that the majority of subject properties in Icelandic and Faroese make reference to working subjects, whereas in German, the majority of subject properties make reference to final 1s.

(15) a.	Subject tests in Icelandic and Faroese	b.	Subject tests in German
	<i>A controller DP is a working 1</i>		<i>A controller DP is a working 1</i>
	<i>A controlled DP is a working 1</i>		<i>A controlled DP is a final 1</i>
	<i>Raising-to-Object targets working 1s</i>		<i>Raising-to-Object targets final 1s</i>
	<i>A reflexive is anteceded by a working 1</i>		<i>A reflexive is anteceded by a working 1</i>

According to (15), a controlled subject has to be a final 1 in German. As lexical quirks are final 3s, they cannot satisfy that requirement. In Icelandic and Faroese, however, a controlled subject needs only to be a working 1. Since lexical quirks are working 1s, they are licit controlled subjects there. For the same reason, lexical quirks are licit raising targets in Icelandic and Faroese but not in German. Controller DPs, however, can be working 1s in all three languages, capturing (9a) but still excluding (11b). Similarly, reflexives can be anteceded by working 1s in all three languages, explaining (10a). In order to account for the difference in case marking between the raised working 1s in Icelandic and Faroese, I propose the following constraint specific to Icelandic.

(16) *If a DP is a working 3, then 3 is the DP’s output grammatical relation*

In order to understand this constraint, the term OUTPUT GRAMMATICAL RELATION requires some explication. This term is basically parallel to the notion of OUTPUT ARC in the Arc-Pair Grammar framework, a successor of relational Grammar (Johnson & Postal 1980; Pankau 2013; Postal 2010). Ignoring the details, Arc-Pair Grammar identifies output arc as relevant for case marking (Pankau 2013, §6.6), in contrast to Relational Grammar, which lacked an account of case marking. Output grammatical relations usually correspond to the final (core) grammatical relation an element bears, but this constraint can be overridden by language specific constraints. The enriched version for (14) is shown in (17), where **bold** indicates output grammatical function.

(17)	<i>Jóni líkar þessi bók</i>	<i>Mær dámar mjólkina</i>	<i>Mir gefällt der Mann</i>
	1	1	1
	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>

In all structures, 3 is the output grammatical function and determines dative case marking. But in Icelandic, this is so for a different reason. Whereas in German and Faroese, output grammatical functions correspond to final relations, in Icelandic a DP that is a working 3 has to have 3 as its output grammatical. Importantly, quirky subjects are both working 1s and working 3s, so 3 is output grammatical relation of a quirky subject in Icelandic. Returning to raised lexical quirks, they have the following structure in Icelandic and Faroese.

(18)	<i>Hann telur Jóni líka þessi bók</i>	<i>Hann heldur meg dáma mjólkina</i>
	1	1
	<b>3</b>	3
	2	<b>2</b>

As indicated, raised lexical quirks are relationally complex. They are final 2s, working 1s (which allows them to undergo raising), and working 3s (they are a 3 at an intermediate level and a final 2). Consequently, a raised lexical quirky has to retain its dative case in Icelandic to satisfy the condition in (18). In Faroese, however, the output grammatical relation is 2, since it is the final relation, and the lexical quirky is regularly assigned accusative case. This analysis also captures why only Icelandic, but not Faroese or German, has passive quirks, cf. (19).

(19)	<i>Þeim var hjálpað</i>	<i>Hann bleiv hjálpin</i>	<i>Ihnen wurde geholfen</i>
	<b>3</b>	3	3
	1	1	<b>3</b>

As (19) indicates, passive quirks are initial 3s but final 1s. Crucially, passive quirks are therefore both working 1s and working 3s. That they are working 1s explains why they pass all subject tests. That they are working 3s explains why passive quirks exist only in Icelandic. For only Icelandic requires case marking to be determined by working 3s. Therefore, initial 3s have to retain their case marking under passivization in Icelandic. The DPs corresponding to passive quirks bear nominative in Faroese, as Faroese is not subject to the constraint in (18). Finally, passive quirky like constructions in German are impersonal, so the indirect object does not undergo advancement to 1. Therefore, it is only a 3 at all levels but never a 1, which explains why passive quirky like DPs in German never show any signs of subjecthood, contrary to lexical quirks.

## References

- Barðdal, Jóhanna. 2002. "Oblique Subjects" in Icelandic and German. *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax* 70(1), 61–99.
- Barðdal, Jóhanna. 2006. Construction-specific properties of syntactic subjects in Icelandic and German. *Cognitive Linguistics* 17(1), 39-106.
- Barðdal, Jóhanna & Þórhallur Eyþórsson. 2003. Icelandic vs. German: Oblique Subjects, Agreement and Expletives. *Proceedings of CSL* 39, 755-773.
- Barðdal, Jóhanna & Þórhallur Eyþórsson. 2006. Control Infinitives and Case in Germanic. In: Leonid Kulikov, Andrej Malchukow & Peter de Swart (eds.), *Case, Valence and Transitivity*. John Benjamins, 147-177.
- Barðdal, Jóhanna & Þórhallur Eyþórsson. 2012. Reconstructing Syntax: Construction Grammar and the Comparative Method. In: Hans C. Boas & Ivan Sag (eds.), *Sign-Based Construction Grammar*. CSLI, 257-308.
- Barnes, Michael. 2001. *Faroese Language Studies*. Novus forlag.
- Bayer, Josef. 2004. Non-nominative Subjects in Comparison. In: Peri Bhaskararao & Karumuri Venkata (eds.), *Non-nominative Subjects, Volume 1*. John Benjamins, 49-76.
- Bouma, Gosse. 1992. A Lexicalist Account of Icelandic Case Marking. In: *Actes du COLING-92*, 94-100.
- Dziwirek, Katarzyna. 1994. *Polish Subjects*. Garland.
- Fanselow, Gisbert. 2002. Quirky "Subjects" and Other Specifiers. In: Ingrid Kaufmann & Barbara Stiebels (eds.), *More than words. A Festschrift for Dieter Wunderlich*. Akademie Verlag, 227-250.
- Haider, Hubert. 2010. *The Syntax of German*. Cambridge University Press.
- Harris, Alice. 1981. *Georgian Syntax*. Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, David & Paul Postal. 1980. *Arc-Pair Grammar*. Princeton University Press.
- Jónsson, Jóhannes Gísli. 1996. *Clausal Architecture and Case in Icelandic*. PhD Thesis, UMass Amherst.
- Jónsson, Jóhannes Gísli. 2003. Not so Quirky: On Subject Case in Icelandic. In: Ellen Brandner & Heike Zinsmeister (eds.), *New Perspectives in Case Theory*. CSLI, 129-165.
- Müller, Stefan. to appear. *Germanic Syntax*. Language Science Press.
- Pankau, Andreas. 2013. *Replacing Copies. The syntax of Wh-Copying in German*. LOT Publications.
- Postal, Paul. 2010. *Edge Based Clausal Syntax. A Study of (mostly) English Object Structure*. MIT Press.
- Perlmutter, David. 1984. Working 1s and Inversion in Italian, Japanese, and Quechua. In: David Perlmutter & Carol Rosen (eds.), *Studies in Relational Grammar 2*. The University of Chicago Press, 292-330.
- Sag, Ivan, Lauri Karttunen, Jeffrey Goldberg. 1992. A Lexical Analysis of Icelandic Case. In: Ivan Sag & Anna Szabolcsi (eds.), *Lexical Matters*. CSLI, 301-318.
- Schätzle, Christin & Miriam Butt & Kristina Kotcheva. 2015. The Diachrony of Dative Subjects and the Middle in Icelandic: A Corpus Study. *Proceedings of the LFG15 Conference*.
- Sigurðsson, Halldór. 1989. *Verbal Syntax and Case in Icelandic*. PhD Thesis, University of Lund.
- Sigurðsson, Halldór. 1992. The case of quirky subjects. *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax* 49(1), 1-26.
- Sigurðsson, Halldór. 2002. To Be an Oblique Subject: Russian vs. Icelandic. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 20(4), 691-724.
- Þráinsson. 2007. *The Syntax of Icelandic*. Cambridge University Press.
- Þráinsson, Höskuldur, Hjalmar P. Petersen, Jógvan í Lon Jacobsen & Zakaris Svabo Hansen. 2004. *Faroese: An Overview and Reference Grammar*. Føroya Fróðskaparfelag.
- Zaenen, Annie, Joan Maling, & Höskuldur Þráinsson. 1985. Case and Grammatical Functions: The Icelandic Passive. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 3(4), 441-483.