Reconciling Burzio's Generalization with unexpected accusatives: from German to Icelandic

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1. Introduction

Icelandic *New Passives* and *Fate Accusatives* surface with structural accusative (ACC) in apparent violation of *Burzio's generalization*.

(1) **Burzio’s Generalization** (Burzio 1986:178): All and only the verbs that can assign a \(\theta\)-role to the subject can assign accusative Case to an object.

*The New Passive* (section 2):

(2) a. Einhver \(\lambda\)amdi stúlkuna (active)
\(\text{someone.NOM beat girl.the.ACC}\)
b. \(^*\)bað var lamið stúlkuna (new passive)
\(\text{it was beaten.N.SG girl.the.ACC}\)

*Fate Accusatives* (section 3):

(3) a. Stormurinn rak bátinn á land (active)
\(\text{the.storm.NOM drove the.boat.ACC on land}\)
b. Hefur bátinn rekið á land? (Fate Accusative)
\(\text{has boat.the.ACC driven on land}\)

**Goal:** I motivate analyses of the two constructions, which allow us to keep an updated version of Burzio's Generalization:

- I propose a view on Burzio's Generalization (BG) that covers both, the standard cases as well as the above cases of unexpected structural ACC.
  - BG does not reflect a dependency relation between an external theta-role and structural ACC (Burzio 1986).
  - Instead, **BG reflects a dependency between two modes of argument encoding**:
    - **I. verbal agreement**, which is determined in syntax via AGREE
    - **II. ACC** (dependent case), which is determined post-syntactically.
  - This dependency is **computed at the PF-interface** on the basis of the \(\phi\)-features on the phase-head (Voice) along the lines in (4) (cf. Schäfer 2008, 2012a, b):
(4a). **Dependent case** (ACC): A DP is realized at PF with dependent case if it is not involved in the valuation of the local Voice-head via AGREE.

b. **Default case** (NOM): A DP not realized with dependent case appears with default case.

c. **Inherent and lexical case** takes precedence over default and dependent case.

**Key property**: (4a) leaves it open whether Voice is valued by the (closest) argument DP or in an alternative way (alternatives follow from the theory of AGREE; see below). Therefore, ACC does not necessarily depend on a second DP.

- (4a-b) follow Sigurðsson's (2000, 2003, 2009) insight that **structural case is computed inside vP/VoiceP** (see also Marantz, 2007).

- For ease of presentation, I assume the decomposition in (5) (Collins 2005, Sigurðsson 2011, Bruening 2012):

\[
\text{TP} \ {\text{T}}_{\{uP, uN, uG\}} \ {\text{Voice}}_{\{uP, uN, uG\}} \ {\text{DP-subject}} \ {\{P, N, G\}} \ V \ [\ {\text{VP}} \ {\text{VDP-object}} \ {\{P, N, G\}} \ ]]
\]

- A Voice-head (active, passive or unaccusative) combines with a vP and determines whether v introduces an overt, an implicit or no external argument at all.

\[
\begin{align*}
(6) \ a. \ &\ldots \ {\text{VoiceP}}_{-\text{transitive/nergative}} \ {\text{Voice}}_{\{uP, uN, uG\}} \ {\text{DP}}_{\{P, N, G\}} \ V \ [\ {\text{VP}} \ {\text{VDP}}_{\{P, N, G\}} \ ] \\
&\ldots \ {\text{VoiceP}}_{-\text{passive}} \ {\text{Voice}}_{\{uP, uN, uG\}} \ {\text{DP}} \ V \ [\ {\text{VP}} \ {\text{VDP}}_{\{P, N, G\}} \ ] \\
&\ldots \ {\text{VoiceP}}_{-\text{unaccusative}} \ {\text{Voice}}_{\{uP, uN, uG\}} \ {\text{DP}} \ V \ [\ {\text{VP}} \ {\text{VDP}}_{\{P, N, G\}} \ ] 
\end{align*}
\]

- **Canonical Voice-heads come with a set of unvalued φ-features** to be valued by the closest DP.

- **Case determination:**
  - At PF, the closest DP to Voice will get NOM due to (4b).
  - If the structure involves a further DP (an object), this will get ACC due to (4a).
  - The system derives the standard cases of BG (canonical unaccusatives and passives).2

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1 Note that a decomposition according to which subjects are merged in Spec,VoiceP (e.g. Alexiadou et al. 2006, to appear) would work, too, if Voice can search its m-command domain for the closest DP (cf. Müller 2008; Schäfer 2008). See fn. 2 for some case-related reasoning why this alternative might be, in fact, preferable.

2 The algorithm in (4) can account for "clean" cases of ergative languages with the absolute argument triggering verbal agreement if some adjustment to the structure and the derivations in (5, 6) is made:
   - (i) We need a decomposition with the external argument introduced in Spec,VoiceP (e.g. Alexiadou et al. 2006, to appear).
   - (ii) In accusative languages, Voice searches its m-command domain for the closest DP; Spec,VoiceP is closer than material embedded in the complement of Voice (cf. Müller 2008).
   - (iii) In ergative languages, Voice searches its c-command domain (or searches its m-command domain before the external argument is merged; cf. Müller 2008).

The system in (4) seems to fail, on first sight, in languages where the ergative DP, i.e. the argument with dependent case, triggers verbal agreement. Such languages motivated Marantz (1992/2000) to dissociate morphological agreement from morphological case. However, to my knowledge, accusative languages never show verbal agreement (only) with the accusative DP, a fact that is unexpected under Marantz's account. A way to explain verbal agreement with ergative subjects could work along the following line: (i) within VoiceP, the absolute DP values in fact the features of Voice. (ii) However, since overt verbal agreement is the spell-out of phi-features on T, T has to cyclically agree with an element inside VoiceP (cf. 7). In 'clean' ergative languages, T agrees with Voice, and, in turn, with the absolute DP. Alternatively, T does not agree with Voice but with its closest DP, which is the subject in Spec,VoiceP. This alternative will produce ergative agreement but never accusative agreement. Needless to say that (4a-c) faces numerous further challenges from ergative languages.
• Agreement determination:
  - The features that Voice receives from its closest DP are transferred to T via cyclic AGREE (7) (cf. Legate 2005, Marantz, to appear).
  - Spell-Out of T determines verbal agreement at PF.

(7) \[ \text{TP} \underbrace{T_{\{uP, uN, uG\}}} \underbrace{\text{Voice}_{\{P, N, G\}}} \ldots \]

2. The New Passive  (a.k.a. 'New Construction' or 'New Impersonal')

Whether the New Passive is a real passive or an impersonal construction with a covert subject \textit{(pro)} (Maling & Sigurjónsdóttir 2002), is still a topic of discussion.

\textbf{I will follow here without further discussion the argumentation in some recent literature that the New Passive is a real passive in that the external argument is absorbed/implicit in the same way as it is in canonical passives} (e.g. Barðal & Molnár 2003, Eyþórsson 2008, Jónsson 2009, Sigurðsson 2011, Árnadóttir et al. 2011; pace Legate to appear).

Therefore, I use the term ‘New Passive’.

\textbf{As canonical passives, the New Passive involves a v-head without specifier that introduces an existentially bound external argument in the semantics.}

For reasons of space, \textbf{I will concentrate on passives of canonical transitive verbs (NOM-ACC verbs)}. As far as I can see, verbs with lexically case marked objects can easily be subsumed under the present proposal (see Sigurðsson 2011 for a more detailed discussion).

• Canonical Passives (e.g. Zaenen, Maling & Thráinsson 1985, Sigurðsson 1989, 2011, Thráinsson 2007, Eyþórsson 2008, a.o.):
  - Absorption of the external argument triggers ACC-to-NOM conversion on the object DP, which, furthermore, triggers agreement on the auxiliary and the participle.
  - DP_{NOM} can A-move out of vP or, if indefinite, stay inside vP (Sigurðsson 2000, 2011, Thráinsson 2007 and Eyþórsson 2008).
  - Even if the object DP stays inside vP, it still receives nominative case and triggers agreement on the auxiliary and the participle.

(8) a. Einhver lamdi stúlkuna.  (Active)
   \textit{someone beat girl.the.ACC}
   ‘Someone beat the girl.’

b. Stúlkan var lamin.  (Canonical Passive)
   \textit{girl.the.NOM was beaten.FEM.SG}
   ‘The girl was beaten.’

c. Það var lamin stúlka/*stúlkan.  (Impersonal Canonical Passive)
   \textit{it was beaten.FEM.SG girl.NOM/girl.the.NOM}
   ‘A/The girl was beaten.’

  - As is well known, the *New Passive* is accepted only by some (typically younger) speakers, therefore the %-sign in (9a, b).

  - As in canonical passives, the external argument is absorbed/implicit and the standard passive auxiliary ‘vera’ and the standard passive participle are used.

  - However, three properties set the New Passive apart from the canonical passive:³

    (i) There is no ACC-to-NOM conversion and, in turn, the auxiliary and the participle show up with default morphology.

    (ii) A-movement of the internal argument out of the vP is impossible.

    (iii) There is no definiteness effect (since (iii) is arguably a direct consequence of ii, I will concentrate on (i) and (ii) below).

(9) a. *pað var lamið stúlk. (New Passive)
   it was beaten.N.SG girl.ACC
   ‘A girl was beaten.’

   b. *pað var lamið stúlkuna. (New Passive)
   it was beaten.N.SG girl.the.ACC
   ‘The girl was beaten.’

   c. *pað var stúlk lamið. (New Passive)
   it was girl.ACC beaten.N.SG
   ‘A girl was beaten.’

   d. *pað var stúlkuna lamið. (New Passive)
   it was girl.the.ACC beaten.N.SG
   ‘The girl was beaten.’

- **The analysis in Sigurðsson (2011):**

  - As Sigurðsson (2011) stresses, (i-iii) are not general properties of the New Passive variety:

    - Violations of Burzio’s Generalization are not a general property of speakers of the New Passive variety. They do not show up with other structures lacking an external argument (e.g. canonical passives, which are still possible, unaccusatives).

    - The absence of the definiteness effect/blocking of A-movement is not a general property of speakers of the New Passive variety; it does not show up with other structures lacking an external argument (e.g. canonical passives, unaccusatives).

**Conclusion:** (i-iii) must be related to properties of this specific Voice (Voice\textsubscript{NewP}).

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³ (9a-d) are taken from Eyþórsson 2008. (9a, b) were slightly modified; p.c. Thórhallur Eythórsson
• To derive ii (blocking of A-movement), Sigurðsson (2011) proposes that little v in the New Passive comes with a set of valued \( \varphi \)-features\(^4\), which intervene between T and the internal argument, thereby blocking A-movement of the latter. The vP in the New Passive is, therefore, a strong phase. (Property iii (absence of DE) follows from property ii)

\[(10)\]  
\[T, -probing \text{ in the New Passive is blocked by the valued phi-features on } v\]

\[\left[ CP \ldots TP \ldots T, \ldots [vP \varphi-v-V \text{ NP } \ldots \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \right] \]

• The effect is assumed to be similar to the intervention of Ps which block pseudo-passives (if the preposition does not incorporate); see (11a-d) from Sigurðsson (2011):

\[(11)\]
a. \(\text{þá var oft talað } um \text{ Ólaf.} \) (Eventive P-passive)  
\[\text{then was often talked about Olaf.} \]
\[\text{‘People then often talked about Olaf.’} \]
b. \(\ast \text{þá var } \text{Ólafur oft talaður } um. \) (\( \ast \) Eventive NOM pseudo passive)  
\[\text{then was } \text{Olaf.N often talked about} \]
c. \(\ast \text{þá var } \text{Ólaf oft talað } um. \) (\( \ast \) Eventive ACC pseudo passive)  
\[\text{then was } \text{Olaf.A often talked about} \]
d. \(\text{þá var } \text{Ólafur oft umtalaður.} \) (Stative NOM pseudo passive)  
\[\text{then was } \text{Olaf.N often about-talked with P-incorporation} \]
\[\text{‘Then, Olaf was often a talked about person.’} \]

\[(12)\]  
\[T, \text{ cannot access P-objects because the phi-features on } P \text{ intervene} \]

\[\left[ CP \ldots TP \ldots T, \ldots [vP \ldots v-V_{\text{PASS}} \text{ PP } \ldots \varphi-P \text{ NP } \ldots \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \right] \]

--- In my proposal above, Voice comes with phi-features (is the phase head).

--- I assume that the Icelandic lexicon provides (among others) the following Voice-heads:

\[(13)\]
a. Voice-active \{uP, uN, uG, D\} (all speakers)  
b. Voice-passive \{uP, uN, uG\} (all speakers)  
c. Voice-new-passive \{3rd, SG, Neuter\} (New Passive variant)

• To derive i (no ACC-to-NOM conversion), Sigurðsson (2011) suggests that Voice\text{\textsubscript{NewP}} has the idiosyncratic property to trigger ACC (in technical terms: not to trigger case-star-deletion).

\[^{4}\text{For ease of presentation, I use a slight simplification of Sigurðsson's proposal. For him, the new passive absorbs only the theta role but not the phi-features of the external argument. These features remain probably in Spec,vP. Since (i) I do not believe in “absorption” and since (ii) v-heads need to be equipped with phi-features anyway to implement long distance AGREE and since (iii) the features empirically found on Passive v-heads cannot be equated with the features of the implicit argument (Schäfer 2012a), I turn already here to a version of his account that located the features on the head of the projection.} \]
• A problem with this proposal: it dissociates the explanation for i) from that for ii). This leaves it as a coincidence that the speakers of the New Passive variety introduced the properties i) and ii) into their grammar in the context of the very same construction/Voice.  
• An alternative proposal: The algorithm in (4) allows us to relate i) and ii): If Voiceₚ comes from the lexicon with valued φ-features, which block A-movement, then (4a) predicts that a DP inside Voiceₚ will get ACC (modulo inherent/lexical case).

(14) \[ TP \ T \left[ \text{Voice} \ \text{VoiceP}_{\text{NewPass}}(P,N,G) \left[ \text{VP} \ V \ \text{V-} \text{object}(P,N,G) \right]\right] \]

  (i) Intervention for A-movement
(ii) DP-object not involved in the valuation of Voice: ACC

• Potential problem 1: While it seems to be a welcome result if i-iii could be related to one underlying factor (valued φ-features on Voiceₚ), Fate Accusatives seem to pose a problem (section 3).

• Potential Problem 2: postulating a Voiceₚ that starts the derivation with valued phi-features might look like a stipulation.

  ▪ However, a reasonable story how Voiceₚ could have evolved is via 'Passives of Reflexive Verbs'. Standard Icelandic (Sigurðsson 1989, Eythórsson 2008, Árnadóttir et al. 2011, a.o.) as well as German (Plank 1993, Vater 1995, Schäfer 2012a) allow the Passivization of Reflexive Verbs (15, 16).  

(15) Zuerst wird sich geküsst, später dann geheiratet.
  first becomes REFL kissed, later then married
  ‘First people kiss each other, then they marry.’

(16) (?)ðað ar baðað sig á laugardögum.
  expl was bathed REFL.ACC on saturdays
  ‘People took a bath on Saturdays.’ (Sigurðsson 1989:355, fn. 60)  

  ▪ (16) seems to violate BG as the reflexive sig carries structural accusative. Crucially, (16) is accepted by many speakers that do not accept New Passives (cf. fn. 8).
Schäfer (2012a) proposes that the ACC on the anaphors in (15/16) can be derived via (4a) if *unvalued* Voice and the *unvalued* anaphor form an AGREE-chain which gets *valued by default agreement* to avoid a crash at the interfaces.

\[(17)\]
\[
\begin{array}{c}
TP \\
T \quad \text{VoiceP}_{\text{passive}} \\
\quad \quad \text{Voice'} \\
\quad \quad \quad \text{Voice}_{\text{pass}} \{uP, uN, uG\} \\
\quad \quad \quad \quad \text{vP} \\
\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad v \\
\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{V} \\
\quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{sig}_{\{uP, uN, uG\}} \\
\end{array}
\]

\textit{default agreement}

- **The emergence of the New Passive:**
  
  - I propose that speakers of the New Passive variety have grammaticalized the outcome of this frequent repair phenomenon via Default Agreement.
  
  - That means that these speakers (mis-)interpreted the PF of Passives of Reflexive Verbs as an indication that there exists a passive v-head with *valued* ϕ-features.
  
  - Note that Icelandic *sig*, but not German *sich*, is *overtly* marked for ACC; this might explain why German has not developed and probably will never develop a New Passive.

2.1 **Further motivation for the case algorithm in (4a-c): We even need it in transitives**

- In Schäfer (2008, 2012b), I argued that reflexive anticausatives (18b) in Germanic and Romance have the structure in (19);\(^9\) the nominative theme is an internal argument and the accusative reflexive pronoun/clitic is the expletive realization of an external argument.

  - This ergative-kind case pattern cannot be derived in standard case accounts. It follows, however, from (4a, b) if the reflexive pronoun, although the closest DP to Voice, has unvalued ϕ-features and, therefore, cannot value Voice.\(^{10}\) Instead, the theme values Voice and the reflexive gets ACC. As a side effect, the reflexive agrees with the theme.

\[(18)\]
\[
\begin{array}{l}
a. \text{weil Hans}_{\text{nom}} \text{ den Kasten}_{\text{acc}} \text{ öffnete} \\
as \text{John the box opened} \\
\text{because John opened the box}' \\
b. \text{weil sich}_{\text{acc}} \text{ der Kasten}_{\text{nom}} \text{ öffnete} \\
as \text{REFL the box opened} \\
\text{because the box opened}'
\end{array}
\]

\[(19)\]
\[
[\text{Voice}_{\text{P-expletive}} \text{ Voice}_{\{uP, uN, uG\}} [\text{vP sich}_{\{uP, uN, uG\}} v [\text{vP open the box}_{\{P, N, G\}}]]]
\]

\(^9\) I slightly adjusted the structure proposed in Schäfer 2008 to the system introduced in section 1.

\(^{10}\) Icelandic uses -st as an anticausative marker. There are good reasons to assume that -st is not marked for Case (Wood 2012, to appear).
3. Fate Accusatives

- Introduction:
  - My proposal above relates properties i) and ii): unexpected accusative seems to correspond necessarily with the lack of A-movement.
  - Fate Accusatives seem to suggest that one should better keep separated these two properties, because their unexpected accusative DP A-moves out of vP if definite.
  - I show that the correspondence between i) and ii) does not have to be absolute in my system.

  - This term makes reference to a set of verbs which (seem to) undergo the causative alternation, but where, unexpectedly, the sole argument of the intransitive variant keeps the same case marking as the object of the transitive variant (ACC or DAT).
  - Their ACC is structural in so far as it disappears under canonical passivization (examples from Sigurðsson 2005, 2011).

\[(20)\]

a. Hún fyllti bátinn. \hspace{1cm} \text{(transitive)}
   she filled boat.the.ACC
   ‘She filled the boat (with some cargo).’

b. Báturinn var fylltur. \hspace{1cm} \text{(passive)}
   boat.the.NOM was filled
   ‘The boat was filled (with some cargo).’

c. Bátinn fyllti. \hspace{1cm} \text{(Fate Accusative)}
   boat.the.ACC filled
   ‘The boat swamped.’

**Interpretation of Fate Accusatives:** Fate Accusatives have a get-passive fate reading of a sort. The fate reading of fate unaccusative predicates is never shared by the ‘same’ predicate when either transitive or passive (cf. Ottósson 1988, Sigurðsson 2005, 2011).

**Movement:** Crucially, Fate Accusatives differ from New Passives in that the accusative DP can move out of the vP (and therefore shows a definiteness effect) (cf. 21, p.c. Jim Wood):

\[(21)\]

Hefur (bátinn) rekið (*bátinn) á land?
   has boat.the.ACC driven boat.the.ACC on land
   ‘Did the boat get drifted ashore?’

- Sigurðsson (2011):
  - **Fate Accusatives** differ form the New Passive in that they do not involve ϕ-features on v/Voice. Therefore, A-movement is not blocked.
  - They involve a specific Voice-FATE, which has the idiosyncratic property that ACC is licensed (no case-star-deletion) and triggers FATE-semantics.
Fate Accusatives dissociate unexpected ACC from lack of A-movement.

I cannot derive ACC by assuming a Voic\(_{\text{FATE}}\) with valued phi-features.

- **Alternative proposal** (Haider 2001, Platzack 2006, Schäfer 2008): **Fate Accusatives are hidden transitives** with a covert external argument pro.

\[
[\text{VoiceP} \text{Voice} [\text{VP} \text{vP} [\text{VP} \text{vP DP-theme}]])
\]

- This pro is the same as one that arguably shows up with Icelandic weather verbs (23a) (cf. Sigurðsson 1989:164).

- **Icelandic weather verbs** never take an overt (semi-)argumental expletive (as e.g. German (23b)).

- But if we every verb **must take at least one semantic argument (due to a ban on empty predication)**, then Icelandic weather verbs must involve a covert subject, a weather-pro in Spec,\(v\)P (On the (semi-)argumental status of the “expletive” in weather verbs, see e.g. Bolinger 1972, Rizzi 1986, Vikner 1995).

\begin{enumerate}
\item \begin{enumerate}
\item a. Rigndi pro\(_{\text{weather}}\) mikið í gær ?
\item b. weil *(es) regnet
\end{enumerate}
\end{enumerate}

\begin{enumerate}
\item if Fate Accusatives involve an external argument (pro), then ACC is predicted by any analysis of Burzio's Generalization.
\end{enumerate}

- **I mention a number of arguments in favor of pro in Fate Accusatives in section 3.1.**

- **Before we turn to them, we must face the biggest challenge for this proposal:** **Why does the covert subject in Fate Accusatives not block A-movement?**

\begin{enumerate}
\item Hefur (bátinn) pro\(_{\text{weather}}\) rekið (*bátinn) á land?
\item Hér má (*bókina) ekki pro\(_{\text{modal}}\) auglýsa (bókina).
\end{enumerate}

11 Cf. also Szucsich (2007) for a similar (or probably quite the same) construction in Russian and other Slavic languages. See also Markman (2004) and Lavine (2013) for proposals that try to relate unexpected accusatives to the presence of a causative event. However, see Schäfer (2008) and Alexiadou et al (2006, to appear) for arguments that even ordinary anticausatives involve a causative event.
• **Answer:** The covert subjects in (24) and (25) differ in interpretation and, in turn, in their feature make up.

- $\textit{pro}_{\text{modal}}$ refers to a human entity similar to English 'one', German 'man' or French 'on'. Along the lines of Sigurðsson & Egerland (2009) I assume that it is specified as [+human] as well as for 3rd. person (but not for number).

- $\textit{pro}_{\text{weather}}$ of weather verbs, and by hypothesis also of FAs, refers to some referentially extremely underspecified non-human force (see section 3.1; Bolinger 1972). With Rizzi (1986) I assume, therefore, that weather-pro(noun)s have a reduced set of $\varphi$-features involving only a number-feature (sg) but no person- or gender-feature.

• **Proposal:** the amount/type of feature specification on $\textit{pro}$ determines whether it acts as an intervener for A-movement.

- The features of $\textit{pro}_{\text{modal}}$ trigger intervention, while the sole number feature of $\textit{pro}_{\text{weather}}$ does not.

- However, the number feature on $\textit{pro}_{\text{weather}}$ suffices to trigger ACC on the internal argument along the lines of (4a).

• **Prediction:** This proposal makes the prediction that - just as the (hypothetical) subject in FAs - the subject of weather verbs should not intervene for A-movement.

- While weather verbs are normally intransitive, it is possible to combine them with (dative) internal arguments as in (26).\(^{12}\) The example then shows that this prediction is confirmed; the internal argument leaves the vP if definite (p.c. Halldor A. Sigurðsson).

(26) ðá mundi (spurningunum) rigna (*spurningunum) yfir okkur

then questions.the.DAT rain questions.the.DAT over us

'Then it would rain these questions on us.' (= We would have to face these questions.)

3.1 **Further arguments for $\textit{pro}$ in Fate Accusatives:**

**The German 'es'-construction:** German has a parallel construction with the weather pronoun \(\textit{es}\) (it) in Spec,vP (27c) (Haider 2001), which shares many properties with Fate Accusatives.

(27) a. weil der Wind den Kahn ans Land trieb

as the wind.NOM the boat.ACC at land drove

b. weil der Kahn ans Land trieb

\(^{12}\) The internal argument of Icelandic weather verbs is marked with dative (Maling 2002). Note that the corresponding German example would use an overt weather-expletive as in (i), suggesting that the Icelandic example is in fact transitive, not an unergative with a quirky subject replacing the weather-pro of the canonical weather verb.

(i) Dann hat *es* tausende Fragen auf uns geregnet.
then has \(\textit{it}\) thousand questions.ACC on us rained

'Then it rained thousand questions on us. (The we had to face lots of questions.)' However, arguments for this conclusion from within Icelandic would be preferable. Jim Wood (p.c.) informed me that the is an antiquated use of Icelandic weather verbs involving a third person subject pronoun \(\textit{hann}\); this shows that these verbs can take subjects in addition to the dative argument.
as the boat.NOM at land drove
c. weil es den Kahn ans Land trieb
   as it.NOM the boat.ACC at land drove

Verb classes: Kainhofer (2002) examines Fate Accusatives and divides the verbs involved into different semantic classes. She shows that, for each semantic subclass, there are German verbs that allow the ‘es-construction’.

No plain anticausative use: As far as I understand, most Fate Accusatives lack a plain unaccusative use where the theme appears with nominative case. In German, the situation is different. While not every anticausative makes a nice es-construction (probably for semantic/conceptual reasons) almost every verb forming the es-construction also has an anticausative use. However, even in German we find some verbs that i) allow agents and causers as subjects, ii) do not form anticausatives but iii) do form the es-construction:

(28) a. Der Jäger / Der Fels erschlug das Reh
    the hunter / the rock struck-dead the deer
  b. Da hat es das Reh erschlagen
    there has it the deer struck-dead
  c. *Das Reh erschlug (sich)
    the deer struck-dead REFL

Natural forces as subject: Ottóson (1988): "Zeanen & Maling have not accounted for the semantic generalisation that many case-preserving verb pairs are verbs involving natural forces, most commonly weather verbs, and no verbs of that semantic class are non-case-preserving.

(29) a. Bátinn rak frá landa
    the boat drifted from land
  b. ?Sterkir straumar ráku bátinn frá landi
    strong currents drifted the boat from land

(30) a. Strompinn blés af húsinu
    the chimney.acc got blown off the house
  b. Stormurinn blés stompinn af húsinu
    the storm blew the chimney from the house
  c. Strompurinn var blásinn af húsinu
    the chimney.nom was blown from the house

External argument restrictions: Sigurðsson (2005, 2008) argues that some verbs forming Fate Accusatives do not really tolerate causer but only agent subjects in their causative use (he rejects a counterpart of (29b) above. At least in principle, German is similar in that it also allows the ‘es-construction’ with verbs that do not tolerate (all types of) causer subjects: ¹³

¹³The German verb ‘füllen’ (to fill) clearly detransitivizes (i) and does allow other types of non-human external arguments (ii).

(i) weil sich das Boot mit Wasser gefüllt hat
   because REFL the boat with water filled has
(ii) weil der Regen das Boot mit Wasser gefüllt hat
    because the rain the boat with water filled has

I do not know whether corresponding examples are possible in Icelandic. Note that if it is true that the relevant Icelandic verbs do not tolerate any causers, this could argue against an unaccusative analysis of Fate
(31) a. Sjórinn fyllti bátinn  
the.sea.NOM filled the.boat.ACC  
‘The sea filled the boat’  
b. Báttinn fyllti (af sjó)  
the.boat.ACC filled (with sea)  
‘The boat swamped’

(32) a. weil die See das Boot (mit Wasser) gefüllt hat  
because the sea the boat (with water) filled has  
b. weil es das Boot mit Wasser gefüllt hat  
because it the boat.ACC with water filled has

**Morphological properties:** As shown by Zaenen & Maling 1984, Fate accusatives never show anticausative morphology. All Fate accusative verbs have the very same morphological shape as their transitive counterparts. Other verbs undergoing the canonical causative alternation involving ACC-to-NOM advancement show very often (but not always) morphological differences (stem alternation, st- derivation):

(33)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intransitive verb</th>
<th>Transitive verb</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sökkva, sök, sokkið</td>
<td>‘sink’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stökkva, stökk, stokkið</td>
<td>‘jump’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sleppa, slapp, sloppið</td>
<td>‘escape’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>týnast, týndist, týnast</td>
<td>‘lose’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sökkva, sökkti, sökkt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stökkva, stökkti, stökkt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sleppa, sleppti, sleppt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>týna, týndi, týnt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The same holds for German:

(34) a. Hans hat das Schiff versenkt (causative)  
b. Das Schiff ist versunken (anticausative)  
c. Dann hat es das Schiff versenkt/*versunken (es-construction)

**Semantic Idiosyncracies:** Sigurðsson (2005) mentions, that Icelandic Fate Accusatives often show interpretative idiosyncrasies. The same is, at least sometimes, the case in German. The verb ‘zerbröseln’ undergoes the causative alternation with its literal meaning (“to crumble”). In the ‘es-construction’, the meaning changes to something like “fall down on ones face”.

(35) a. Er zerbröselt das Brot he crumbs the bread  
b. Das Brot zerbröselt the bread crumbs

(36) Da hat es ihn zerbröselt  
there has it him crumbed  
‘Then he fell down on his face’

Accusatives. However, we have seen above that this is not true. Note, furthermore, that there is a very strong (though not perfect) crosslinguistic generalization, which says that verbs, which restrict their external argument position to agents do not form anticausatives (e.g. Levin & Rappaport Hovav 1995, Reinhart 2000). If Fate Accusatives of verbs selecting agents as their external argument were really case-preserving anticausatives lacking any external argument, then Icelandic would provide an exception to this strong cross-linguistic generalization.
**Interpretation 1**: The Icelandic and the German construction have very similar interpretations:

Sigurðsson (2005:105-107): “… the peculiar ‘accusative unaccusative’ construction in Icelandic has a special uncontrolled process semantics, a get-passive fate reading of a sort, hence the term Fate Accusative.”

Platzack (2006: 82): “… cases like (…) have an uncontrolled process or fate reading, often with a natural force as a kind of hidden agent.

Haider (2001:5): “… [It] is an impersonal construction with the interpretation of an unidentified cause of the event.

**Interpretation 2**: The presence of a weather expletive can explain the FATE-semantics. Since these pronouns have a reduced phi-feature set, they are referentially defective. The constructions under discussion express that (i) there is an external argument involved in causing the change of state denoted by the verb, which can, however, not be identified. (Recall that weather expletives cannot be used as an answer to questions such as ‘who is responsible’).

**Origin of the FATE semantics (Schäfer 2008)**: The FATE semantics originate at the CI-interface because:

(i) there is a syntactically represented external argument
(ii) the denotation of this argument remains unclear/vague.

In Schäfer (2008) I proposed that thematic interpretation is determined at the CI-interface; it strongly depends on the denotation/reference of a DP-argument. Reflexively marked anticausatives lack an external argument, because the reflexive lacks an antecedent and, in turn, remains referentially defective. 'es' with its reduced phi-feature set receives a very vague interpretation which is mainly driven by the verb's encyclopaedic meaning. We derive different hierarchies and subset relations:

The external arguments can involve subsets of phi-features, which relate to their denotation or reference:

(37) Referentiality scale: $\text{DP}\{D, \Phi\} > \text{es}\{D, \Phi\text{ reduced}\} > \text{sich}\{D\} > (\text{no \ Voice})$

- The transitivity scale makes steps with respect to semantic and syntactic transitivity:

(38) causative $>$ es-construction $>$ reflexive anticausative $>$ unmarked anticausative

- Transitive Change of state verbs form a subset of the following constructions

(39) $[[[\text{ causatives } ] \text{ es-construction } ] \text{ anticausative } ]$

Similar uses of weather-*es* can be found in English. Bolinger (1972) uses examples as the following ones to argue that ambient *it* is a) not restricted to weather-verbs/situations, b) appears in transitive contexts and c) has a semantic value; it can denote something like ambience, environment, circumstances, weather or time (see also Ruwet 1991):
(40)  a. I can't walk. It's oozing oil all over here!
    b. Get away from here; it's too dangerous. Look at the way it's shooting sparks.
    c. Come down here in the basement and look at the way it's dripping water from every pipe.

(41)  a. How is it up there? It's practically ripping the trees out.
    b. It's brewing a tempest
    c. It's threatening a storm
    d. What's it going to be like today? Another sizzler. It's building up quite a temperature
    e. Isn't it nice out this afternoon? You must be crazy. It's so hot that it's giving me a headache.
    f. It's cold enough to freeze the balls on brass monkey

**Interpretation 3**: The 'by itself' test is typically taken to diagnose the presence of an external argument (agent, causer). Crosslinguistically, anticausatives, but not passives, license 'by itself'.

(42)  a. The plate broke by itself  
    b. The vase was broken (*by itself)

Although judgements are extremely subtle, both, the German 'es-construction' and the Icelandic 'Fate Accusative construction' seem to differ from plain anticausatives in being degraded under modification with 'by itself' (Schäfer 2008):

(43)  a. Die Vase zerbrach von selbst  
    b. The vase broke by SELF

(44)  a. weil es den Kahn (*?von selbst) ans Land trieb because it the boat.ACC by SELF to-the beach drove  
    b. Den Kamin hat es (*von selbst) vom Dach geweht the.ACC chimney has it by SELF from-the roof blew

(45)  Rúðan brotnaði af sjálfri sér window.glass.the.NOM broke of self REFL

(46)  a. Bátinn rak að landi (*af sjálfum sér) boat.the.ACC drove at land of self REFL  
    b. Strompinn blés af húsinu (*af sjálfum sér) chimney.the.ACC blew from house of self REFL  
    c. Sögunni lauk (*af sjálfri sér) story.the.DAT finished of self REFL

**Some aspects reported about Fate Accusatives, which argue against the pro-proposal:**

A: There are 'Fate Accusatives' with Dative (and Genitive) themes. This dative must be treated as structural in so far as it disappears in nominalizations, adjectival passives and under st-attachment (middle formation); the licensing of the dative depends on the presence of active or passive Voice (Schäfer 2008). Sigurðsson (2005) reports that dative 'Fate

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Accusatives’ never show the Fate semantics. If consistently true, dative ‘Fate Accusatives’ cannot be captured by the pro-proposal.

B. Sigurðsson (2009:fn. 25) reports that at least some Fate Accusatives can also be used with a nominative theme but nevertheless keep their Fate semantics. If consistently true, this makes the pro-proposal untenable.

However, in the absence of clear (and clearly applied) tests for Fate-semantics (e.g. the by-\emph{itself} test), I think that the \emph{pro}-account is the most promising one.\footnote{One might find it problematic that there are some Icelandic change-of-state verbs with object case on the theme which never come with an overt external argument. There are two solutions; first, since the stray \emph{accusative/dative} construction sometimes has idiomatic meanings, these verbs might be frozen idioms. Further, Jónsson (2003: 145f.) reports that many of these verbs describe events which are necessarily brought about by the weather (e.g. ‘brima’ (to foam) (affects only the sea); ‘hema’ (to freeze) (affects only rivers)). As mentioned above, “weather-verbs” never have overt subjects in Icelandic.}

References


Eythórsson, Thórhallur. 2007. Reflexive passives in Icelandic. Handout of a talk given at NORMS Workshop on Pronouns, Binding and Anaphors, University of Iceland.


