

## Dative objects with novel verbs

Although dative case with direct objects in Icelandic has been widely discussed in the literature (see Svenonius 2002, Maling 2002, Barðdal 2001, 2008, and Jónsson 2013 among others), some issues of object case marking are not well understood. One of these issues is case assignment with novel verbs. With the exception of Barðdal (2001, 2008), dative objects of novel verbs have not been subject to a systematic investigation, despite the fact that these verbs are an important source of evidence for the nature of dative case marking in Icelandic.

We will report here on the results of a large-scale study of object case with novel verbs in Icelandic, involving two online surveys with about 400 participants each (see Thórarinsdóttir 2015 for details). We will focus here on verbs that have become part of the Icelandic lexicon in the last 100 years or so, either as borrowings from foreign languages (English or Danish) or as native neologisms. Many of these verbs are highly substandard and only used in informal registers but that has no effect on their case marking, as far as we know.

Our main claim is that a novel verb in Icelandic will take a direct object with dative case if the verb (a) has a translational equivalent that takes a dative object, or (b) the verb expresses caused motion, literally or figuratively. We will refer to (a) as isolate attraction (following Barðdal 2001) and we take the term translational equivalent to mean that the new verb can always be replaced by an existing verb taking a dative object but not necessarily the other way around. If neither (a) nor (b) holds, the object gets accusative case, the default case for direct objects in Icelandic. Thus, we assume, in contrast to Barðdal (2001, 2008), that isolate attraction never triggers accusative objects with novel verbs. Direct objects of novel verbs may exhibit variation between accusative and dative, but the two variants will differ semantically in that the dative variant encodes caused motion but the accusative variant does not. If we are correct, verbs of motion constitute the only class of transitive dative verbs in Icelandic that is truly productive. This is a fairly strong claim given that dative direct objects have been associated with various semantic classes in Icelandic (Maling 2002).

The results of the study by Thórarinsdóttir (2015) show that the following verbs take accusative objects exclusively, or at least predominantly: *domma* ‘dominate’, *fíffa* ‘fix’, *gólfa* ‘speed (a car)’, *gramma* ‘take a picture by using Instagram’, *gúggla* ‘search for on Google’, *jáa* ‘search for on ja.is’, *krakka* ‘crack, unlock’, *offa* ‘turn off’, and *skrína* ‘screen’. To this list we can add many other novel verbs that take only accusative objects and were not included in the study, e.g. *biddslappa* ‘bitchslap’, *blokkera* ‘block’, *blöffa* ‘fool’, *bródera* ‘needle’, *bösta* ‘bust’, *deita* ‘go on a date with’, *digga* ‘dig, like’, *dissa* ‘dish’, *döbba* ‘dub’, *fíla* ‘like’, *fótósjoppa* ‘photoshop’, *hakka* ‘hack’, *hössla* ‘hustle’, *kópera* ‘dub’, *massa* ‘finish with style’, *meisa* ‘spray with mace’, *neutralísera* ‘neutralize’, *pródusera* ‘produce’, *servera* ‘serve’, *stúdera* ‘study’, *synkrónisera* ‘synchronize’, *testa* ‘test’, *updeita* ‘update’, and *upgreida* ‘upgrade’ (see also Barðdal 2008:81-82). These verbs belong to many different semantic classes but what they have in common is that none of them expresses any kind of motion of the object. Moreover, none of these verbs has a translational equivalent taking a dative object. As a result, only accusative case is possible for the direct object.

On the other hand, the following verbs in the study were strongly linked to dative objects: *átsorsa* ‘outsource’, *blasta* ‘play loudly’, *brodkasta* ‘broadcast’, *dánlóða* ‘download’, *droppa* ‘drop, quit’, *drulla* ‘bring, put’, *dömpa* ‘dump’, *flexa* ‘throw

around (valuable items)', *gúffa* 'eat quickly/greedily', *installa* 'install (a program)', *pósta* 'post online', *sjera* 'share online', *slaka* 'pass on', *slumma* 'kick (a ball)', and *sneika* 'sneak'. For some of these verbs, the dative may be due to isolate attraction, e.g. *dánlóda*, *sjera*, and *sneika* (cf. the dative verbs *hlaða niður* 'download', *deila* 'share', and *lauma* 'sneak') but mostly it is literal or metaphorical motion that licenses the dative object. We assume that the latter applies to verbs like *átsorsa*, *installa* and *pósta*. Note also that *installa* has a translational equivalent in *setja upp* (literally 'put up') but this makes no difference for the object case since *setja upp* takes an accusative object.

Some verbs in the study showed considerable variation between accusative and dative. Representative examples of this are provided in (1):

- (1a) Hann bekkaði tvö hundruð kíló/kílóum  
 he.NOM benched two hundred kilos.ACC/DAT  
 'He lifted 200 kilos in bench press'
- (1b) Ég reyndi að peista myndina/myndinni í Word  
 I.NOM tried to paste the.picture.ACC/DAT into Word
- (1c) Hún byrjaði að neimdropa hljómsveitir/hljómsveitum  
 she.NOM started to namedrop bands.ACC/DAT

The crucial difference between the accusative and the dative variant in (1a) is that the latter asserts that the object undergoes motion. By contrast, the accusative variant is consistent with various events that do not necessarily involve any lifting, e.g. putting 200 kilos on a bench press. (We may infer by using world knowledge that the accusative object in (1a) is lifted.) The verb *bekka* can also be used with objects that do not denote a weight, e.g. *bekka heimsmet* (literally 'bench a world record'), in which case only accusative is possible, as expected.

The case variation in (1b) is plausible linked to creation (accusative) vs. motion (dative); see Jónsson (2013) for some relevant discussion. As for (1c), our intuitions are somewhat uncertain but we think that the dative indicates that the object is dropped metaphorically in that it is mentioned as if by accident. In other words, it "drops" out of the mouth of the subject. By contrast, the accusative simply signals that the object is mentioned. In fact, we know that for some speakers *neimdropa* is more or less synonymous with *nefna* 'mention' (which takes an accusative object).

## References

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