Abstract

This paper examines verbal agreement in Icelandic. As previously discussed in the literature, agreement is optional in Icelandic dative-nominative constructions. I present data which suggest that agreement patterns systematically vary according to the type of dative-nominative construction. Agreement is more degraded in transitive expletive constructions than in non-expletive sentences. Likewise, agreement is more degraded in dative-nominative ECM constructions than in monoclausal constructions with nominative objects. I argue that case and φ are independent probes, allowing for nominative to appear on a DP that does not trigger φ-agreement. I propose that while an initial application of Agree is obligatory, additional applications of Agree are optional and I illustrate that the rate of agreement follows from the number of Agree operations required for the φ-probe to reach the nominative goal. Additionally, I show how this system of optional repeated Agree accounts for both the Person Restriction in Icelandic and the notable exceptions in which a [1/2] nominative object is allowed.

Keywords: Icelandic, agreement failures, Agree, optionality, Person Restriction

1 Introduction and Overview of the Data

Icelandic verbs agree in person and number with nominative subjects. As shown in (1), the verb cannot appear in the default form, which is homophonous with the third person singular.
(1) a. Við lásum/*las bókina. b. Þið lásuð/*las bókina.

‘We read the book.’ ‘You read the book.’

(Sigurðsson 1996, EX14-15)

As is well-known, Icelandic has non-nominative subjects (Jónsson 1996/2003, Sigurðsson 2004, Thráinsson 2007, Zaenen, Maling, and Thráinsson 1985, among others). If there is an object in these constructions, the object is nominative. Unlike in (1), the verb optionally agrees with the nominative object and may appear in the default form. This optionality appears in the dative-nominative construction in (2)a and in its transitive expletive counterpart in (2)b.

(2) a. Einum málfraðingi líkaði/líkuðu þessar hugmyndir.

‘One linguist liked these ideas.’

b. Það líkaði/líkuðu einum málfraðingi þessar hugmyndir.

‘One linguist liked these ideas.’ (Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008, EX 12-13)

The most notable account of constructions such as (2) is found in Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008, which builds on observations reported in Holmberg and Hróarsdóttir (2003). Sigurðsson and Holmberg (2008) argue that there are three agreement dialects with respect to constructions such as (2). Speakers of Dialect A prefer agreement in (2)a and allow optional agreement in (2)b. For speakers of Dialect B, agreement is optional in (2)a and marginal in (2)b. In Dialect C, agreement is marginal or not acceptable in both.
constructions in (2). Verbal agreement, therefore, seems to be sensitive not only to the distinction between nominative subjects and nominative objects, but also to the distinction between transitive and transitive expletive constructions.

This paper contributes additional data and builds on Sigurðsson and Holmberg’s (2008) observations. Based on a survey of sixty-one native Icelandic speakers, the rate of agreement in constructions such as (2)a is 47%, while the rate of agreement in constructions such as (2)b is 36%. The optionality in (2) is not limited to constructions with nominative objects. In ECM constructions with matrix nominative subjects and accusative embedded subjects, the matrix verb predictably agrees with the matrix subject, as shown in (3).

(3) Við teljum frambjóðendurna vera frambærilega
    we.nom believe.1pl candidates.the.acc be pretty good

   ‘We believe the candidates to be pretty good.’ (Thráinsson 2007:414)

However, in ECM constructions with dative matrix subjects and embedded nominative subjects, the matrix verb optionally agrees with the nominative embedded subject. As observed with monoclaustral constructions, there is a disparity in agreement between non-expletive constructions and their expletive counterparts. In constructions such as (4)a, the rate of agreement is 36%, while agreement occurs 18% of the time in (4)b.

(4) a. Einum dómara sýndist/sýndust þessar athugasemdir vera óréttlátar.
    one judge.dat understood.dft/3pl these comments.nom.pl be unfair

   ‘One judge understood these comments to be unfair.’
b. Það sýndist/sýndust einum dómara þessar athugasemdir vera óréttlaðar.

expl understood.dft/3pl one judge.dat these comments.nom.pl be unfair

‘One judge understood these comments to be unfair.’

The agreement patterns discussed in this paper are summarized in (5).

(5) Agreement Across Constructions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mono-clauses</th>
<th>Bi-clauses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dat-verb-Nom 47%</td>
<td>Dat-verb-[TP Nom…] 36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expl-verb-Dat-Nom 36%</td>
<td>Expl-verb-Dat[TP Nom…] 18%</td>
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The patterns in (5) are intriguing for three reasons, which I briefly mention here and return to in subsequent sections. First, in the standard account of case and agreement (Chomsky 2000/2001), both types of features are determined via the same Agree relation. T values the case feature on a DP and that same DP values the φ-features on T. Case and agreement are, therefore, taken to be an indivisible feature bundle. On this account, the asymmetry illustrated by obligatory nominative case assignment and optional agreement is unexpected.

Second, optionality in long-distance agreement (LDA) is widely attested cross-linguistically. LDA involves an item in one clause triggering agreement on an item in a different clause - which is what we observe in the agreeing verbal forms in (4) – and several accounts of LDA involve restructuring. Restructuring infinitives are argued to contain less functional structure, and as such, do not constitute independent domains. Wurmbrand (2001) illustrates that case and agreement optionality in German infinitives is due to restructuring and Bhatt (2005) employs restructuring to account for LDA in
Hindi-Urdu. Nomura (2005) argues that the optional agreement in Icelandic biclausal constructions is due to restructuring. As I discuss in more detail in Section 3.3.2, a restructuring analysis accounts for neither the optionality in simplex sentences nor the effect of the expletive.

Sigurðsson and Holmberg’s (2008) analysis does, in fact, account for optional agreement in both simple and biclausal constructions. As discussed in Section 4.3, this analysis is based on derivational timing and intervention effects. However, this proposal does not address the third intriguing aspect of the pattern in (5), the fact that there is degradation in agreement across various types of constructions. That is, the issue is not just that agreement is optional; speakers are less likely to use agreement in some optional-agreement constructions over others. To my knowledge, the systematic nature of optionality in Icelandic agreement has not heretofore been reported and, to my knowledge, no other analysis provides a mechanism to account for this pattern.

There are three primary components of the analysis presented in this paper. First, I argue that case and $\varphi$ are independent probes on T. The consequence of this proposal is that case and $\varphi$-agreement are established via different probe-goal relations. I show that while the case probe is necessarily in an Agree relation with a nominative object, the number probe need not be. Second, I argue that while a probe is necessarily in a relationship with the closest potential goal – accounting for obligatory agreement with nominative subjects – that probe is only optionally in a relationship with a potential goal that is farther away. I argue for a revision to Sequential Agree, which is proposed in Nomura (2005) in order to account for case on nominative objects. Like Nomura (2005) I
show that Sequential Agree is distinct from Multiple Agree (Hiraiwa 2001, 2005). Crucially, Sequential Agree does not obey the simultaneity condition required by Multiple Agree. However, I depart from Nomura (2005) by arguing that Sequential Agree is optional. The third component of the analysis is that I illustrate that as the number of interveners between T and the nominative increases, the less likely it is that Sequential Agree will apply. The rate of agreement is a consequence of the number of Sequential Agree relations required for the φ-probe to reach the nominative.

An additional consequence of optional Sequential Agree is that we are able to account for a problem that is vexing for both purely syntactic and purely morphological approaches to agreement, the Person Restriction in Icelandic. Like languages that exhibit Person Case Constraint (PCC) effects (Anagnostopoulou 2005, Bonet 1991/2007, Rezac 2007/2008, among others), Icelandic restricts the distribution of first and second person objects, with [1/2] nominative objects generally not being allowed. I show that this fact is a consequence of both syntactic and morphological restrictions. Following Preminger 2011b, I argue that a [1/2] DP must be in an Agree relation with a person probe in the same clause. A [1/2] nominative object in Icelandic is ruled out when the person probe fails to Agree with it. Since Sequential Agree is optional, there can also be a feature clash at the point of vocabulary insertion because the dative and the nominative provide conflicting values for the person probe. This analysis predicts that constructions with [1/2] nominative objects should be allowed when Sequential Agree applies and there is a syncretic verbal form that realizes all of the relevant features, and this prediction is confirmed.
This paper is organized as follows: Section 2 outlines my theoretical assumptions. I argue that case and \( \phi \) are separate probes on \( T \) and I motivate my assumption that some features, particularly the number feature in Icelandic, can go unchecked. This proposal builds on Preminger’s (2010/2011a) observation that \( \phi \)-agreement may fail to apply under certain conditions. Section 3 outlines my proposal that multiple applications of Agree are optional, and in doing so, accounts for the systematic degradation in agreement shown in (5). Section 4 builds on this proposal and accounts for the Person Restriction. I discuss previous accounts which also address the differing behavior of person and number features. I highlight the analyses found in Anagnostopoulou 2005, Baker 2008, Preminger 2011b, and Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008. Section 5 discusses post-syntactic frameworks (in particular, Bobaljik 2008 and McFadden 2004/2007) and explores a post-syntactic analysis of these data. I argue that the systematic degradation in agreement supports a syntactic analysis of agreement. Section 6 concludes by discussing the implications for the grammars of individual speakers.

2 Theoretical Assumptions and Outline of Analysis

2.1 Case and \( \phi \) as Separate Probes on \( T \)

I argue that case and agreement features are determined in the syntax. This is a nontrivial position, given several recent proposals which argue that either or both of these features are determined solely at PF. I do, however, assume that the syntax does not have “knowledge” about the actual morphophonological forms of morphemes/words. Rather, I assume the essence of the vocabulary insertion process articulated in the Distributed
Morphology framework, wherein feature bundles are mapped to vocabulary items (Embick and Noyer 2007, Halle and Marantz 1993).

I also follow myriad previous researchers in assuming that nominative is assigned by T and accusative is assigned by v. Associating nominative with T is in contrast to Sigurðsson (2000/2003/2006a), who – in response to Chomsky’s (2000/2001) v/v* distinction (v is φ-incomplete and does not assign case, whereas v* is φ-complete and does assign case) – proposes that both nominative and accusative are assigned by v*.

Having nominative assigned low removes the issue of intervention effects with case assignment to nominative objects, and also removes the well-documented “problem” of nominative case assignment in Icelandic infinitives. (Sigurðsson 1991/2008) On this approach, since v* assigns nominative, non-finite T does not. While Sigurðsson’s (2000/2003/2006a) proposal “breaks the T-Nom connection” (2006:294), my goal is to weaken – not break – the connection between nominative and φ-agreement under a particular structural condition, namely when another DP intervenes between T and the nominative.

This semi-autonomous relationship between case and agreement is counter to the idea that case and φ constitute an indivisible feature bundle. As proposed in Chomsky 2000/2001, both types of features are valued via the same Agree operation, defined in (6).

\[
\alpha > \beta \quad \text{Agree} (\alpha, \beta), \text{where } \alpha \text{ is a probe and } \beta \text{ is a matching goal, ‘} > \text{’ is a c-command relation and uninterpretable features of } \alpha \text{ and } \beta \text{ are checked/deleted.} \quad (\text{Chomsky 2000:122})
\]
T is merged with a valued case feature [Nom] and unvalued $\varphi$-features [$\varphi\Phi$]. DPs are merged with an unvalued case feature [$\varphi\Phi$] and valued $\varphi$-features which specify person/gender/number. T probes a DP in order to value [$\varphi\Phi$] and, in turn, [$\varphi\Phi$] on that DP is valued to nominative.

Descriptively, in nominative-accusative languages, verbs tend to agree with nominative DPs, and in ergative-absolutive languages, verbs tend to agree with absolutive DPs. For instance, in the Gujarati sentence in (7)a, the verb agrees with the absolutive subject and in (7)b, the verb agrees with the absolutive object.

(7)  
(a) Sudha away-i.  
   Sudha(fem).abs came-fem
   ‘Sudha came.’

(b) Sudha-e radio khəridy-o
   Sudha(fem)-erg radio(masc).abs bought-masc
   ‘Sudha bought a radio.’

(Woolford 2006b,EX 38c/39, in Mistry 1976)

Woolford (2006b) illustrates that case-agreement mismatches are highly constrained cross-linguistically. A verb may agree with a non-nominative/absolutive DP only when the verb also agrees with a nominative/absolutive or when there is no nominative/absolutive in the clause. Crucially, verbs do not appear to be able to agree with a non-nominative/absolutive to the exclusion of a nominative/absolutive. Assuming that nominative and absolutive are both assigned by T and that ergative and dative are assigned to the specifier by $\nu$ heads specified for those case values, (see Legate 2008 and Woolford 2006b for discussion), both the Icelandic sentence in (1) and the Gujarati sentences in (7) can be accounted for with the same analysis, shown in (8)a.
The analysis in (8)a makes the prediction that when a DP has its case valued by a different head, that DP cannot value \([uφ]\) on T, as illustrated in (8)b. This prediction is borne out in both Icelandic and Gujarati. In (7)b, the verb agrees with the absolutive, not with the ergative, and in the Icelandic sentence in (9) the verb appears in the default.

(9) Stelpunum leiddist/*leiddust.

girls-the.dat.pl bored.dft/*3pl

‘The girls felt bored.’

While the symbiotic relationship encoded in (8) does exist in some circumstances, it is not true that case and agreement always two sides of the same coin. As we have seen in Icelandic, there is an asymmetry between nominative subjects and nominative objects. Woolford (2006b) also discusses situations in which case and agreement are divorced. For instance, in Warlpiri, verbs usually agree with nominative DPs, as shown in (10)a. However, in (10)b, there is no nominative and the verb agrees with the ergative.

(10) a. Ngaju ka-rama parnka-mi.

I.nom pres-1sg run-nonpast


b. Ngajulu-rlu ka-rama nya-nyi kurdu.

I-erg pres-1sg see-nonpast child.acc

‘I see the child.’ (Woolford 2006b, EX 34, in Simpson 1991)
Another case-agreement asymmetry is found in Hindi-Urdu. In his analysis of long distance agreement in Hindi-Urdu, Bhatt (2005) argues that a DP that has its case valued by one probe may value the φ-features on a different probe. Descriptively, verbs in Hindi-Urdu agree with the highest DP within the clause that is morphologically unmarked for case. Ergative subjects appear in clauses with perfective aspect, and ergative DPs bear the suffix –ne. Since ergative DPs bear an overt case marker, they do not trigger verbal agreement. In simplex clauses with ergative subjects, if there is a non-case-marked object, the verb agrees with that DP. However, in constructions with infinitival complements, the matrix verb either appears in the default form or it agrees with the embedded object. There is default agreement (11)a, but in (11)b the embedded object *tehnii* ‘branch’ triggers agreement.

(11)   a. No LDA, default agreement on matrix verb

\[
\text{Shahruxh-ne [tehnii kaat-naa ] chaah-aa thaa.}
\]

\[
\text{Shahruxh-erg branch.fem cut-inf.masc. want-pfv.masc.sg. be.past.masc.sg}
\]

‘Shahrukh wanted to cut a/the branch.’

b. LDA, matrix verb agrees with embedded object

\[
\text{Shahruxh-ne [tehnii kaat-nii] chaah-ii thii.}
\]

\[
\text{Shahruxh-erg branch.fem. cut-inf.fem. want-pfv.fem. be.past.fem.sg}
\]

‘Shahrukh had wanted to cut the branch.’ (Bhatt 2005, EX 6)

Bhatt (2005) proposes a restructuring analysis for (11)b. Since the embedded object is actually in the same domain (clause) as the matrix verb in (11)b, the condition on agreement is met. Bhatt (2005) argues that the construction in (11)a is non-restructuring.
Since the embedded object is not in the same domain as the matrix verb, there is default agreement.

Salient for the present discussion is that Bhatt’s (2005) proposal “dissociates Case from Agreement” (p.776). Accounts differ on which functional heads are present in restructuring infinitives. Wurmbrand (2001) argues that restructuring clauses in German are bare VPs, while Bhatt (2005) analyzes Hindi-Urdu restructuring clauses as containing vP. Providing evidence from pronoun forms in restructuring clauses that have been passivized, Bhatt (2005) argues that the embedded \( v \) assigns accusative to embedded objects irrespective of whether the clause is restructuring. On Bhatt’s (2005) proposal, even though the embedded object in (11)b is assigned accusative by the embedded \( v \), the object, nonetheless, values the \( \phi \)-features on the matrix T. 4

Taken together, all of these data suggest that case and agreement are semi-autonomous. I propose that \([\text{Nom}]\), \([\text{uPerson}]\), and \([\text{uNumber}]\) are separate probes on T and each feature probes independently. The consequence if this proposal is that some probes on T may be in an Agree relation with a goal, while other probes are not.

2.2 Some Features May Be Left Unchecked

I assume a system in which case and \( \phi \)-features have particular values, as opposed to binary values. As such, functional heads bear the case values \([\text{Nom}]\), \([\text{Abs}]\), \([\text{Erg}]\), \([\text{Dat}]\), etc. and DPs bear the values \([\text{person}=1/2]\), \([\text{number}=\text{pl}]\). (I am abstracting away from gender, since it is not relevant for the present analysis.) I assume that third person DPs lack a person value and singular DPs lack a number value. (Benveniste 1971) Following the standard model, I assume that case-assigning heads are merged with a valued case
feature, whereas DPs are merged with an unvalued case feature. DPs are merged with valued $\varphi$-features and functional heads are merged with unvalued $\varphi$-features.

I follow recent work – namely Preminger 2010/2011a – in arguing that some features can go unvalued without the derivation crashing. A grammatical outcome may result if some features go unchecked, but the failure to check other features leads to a crash. I adopt the Case Filter and assume that DPs need to be assigned a case value. As discussed in Section 4.4, I adopt the Person Licensing Condition proposed in Preminger 2011b, which states that $1/2$ DPs need to be agreed with by a person probe in the same clause. However, I show that Icelandic DPs with a number feature need not be agreed with by a number probe. This crucial difference delivers the restriction against $[1/2]$ nominative objects in Icelandic as well as optional agreement with third person nominative objects.

The idea that the failure to establish some probe-goal relationships is acceptable is consistent with an observation found in Preminger 2010, stated in (12). (Also see Preminger 2011a for a detailed discussion of agreement “failures.”)

(12) “You can fail, but you must try.”

Applying $\Phi$ agreement to a given structure is obligatory, but if the structure happens to be such that $\Phi$ agreement cannot culminate successfully, this is an acceptable outcome.” (2010, EX 58)

Similar to the Standard Arabic data presented in Section 2.1, Hebrew displays an agreement asymmetry between pre and post-verbal subjects. In possessor dative constructions, the possessed DP may appear pre or post-verbally. Agreement is
obligatory with the pre-verbal DP as shown in (13), but lack of agreement is acceptable with the post-verbal DP, as shown in (14).

(13) **SV – Agreement Obligatory**

a. ha-cincenet nafl-a le-Dani  
the-jar.fem fell-3sg.fem dat-Dani

b. * ha-cincenet nafal le-Dani  
the-jar.fem fell-3sg.masc dat-Dani

‘Dani’s jar fell.’  ‘Dani’s jar fell.’

(Preminger 2010, EX 1)

(14) **VS – Lack of Agreement tolerated**

a. nafl-a le-Dani ha-cincenet  
fell-3sg.fem dat-Dani the-jar.fem

b. ? nafal le-Dani ha-cincenet  
fell-3sg.masc dat-Dani the-jar.fem

‘Dani’s jar fell.’  ‘Dani’s jar fell.’

(Preminger 2010, EX 2)

However, when there is no dative, agreement is obligatory with a post-verbal subject, as shown in (15).

(15) **VS – Agreement Obligatory**

a. nafl-a ha-cincenet  
fell-3sg.fem the-jar.fem

b. *nafal ha-cincenet  
fell.3sg.masc the-jar.fem

‘The jar fell.’  ‘The jar fell.’  
(Preminger 2010, EX 7)

Preminger (2010) argues that agreement with post-verbal subjects is not actually optional. Otherwise, we would expect (15) to pattern like (14). The issue is the presence of the dative. Preminger (2010) proposes that while φ-agreement must be attempted, it may fail because of the intervening dative, and I argue that this is precisely what happens in
Icelandic. Agreement is obligatory in expletive intransitive constructions with post-verbal nominative subjects, as shown in (16).

(16) það slógust/*slóst fjórir nemendur á ballinu.

there fought.3pl/*dft four students.nom at dance.the

‘Four students fought at the dance.’

With these assumptions in place, the core of my analysis for optional number agreement is shown in (17) and (18). I return to person agreement in Section 4.

(17) a. T_[Nom] DP_[Nom] = subject agreement
    [uNumber]   [pl]

b. T_[Nom] DP_[Dat] DP_[Nom] = object agreement
    [uNumber]   [pl]

(18) T_[Nom] DP_[Dat] DP_[Nom] = default agreement
    [uNumber]   [pl]

The features on T always probe a subject DP, since the subject is the closest DP to T. As such, there is always agreement with a nominative subject, as shown in (17)a. In (17)b, both [Nom] and [uNumber] probe the object, and consequently, there is number agreement with the nominative object. In the derivation in (18), on the other hand, [Nom] probes the object DP, while [uNumber] does not. The object bears nominative case but the verb appears in the default form. While (17)a is the only possible derivation for constructions with nominative subjects, either (17)b or (18) is possible for constructions with nominative objects.

3 Accounting for Optionality

3.1 Multiple Applications of Agree
Under the standard conceptualization of Agree, there is a one-to-one relationship between probe and goal. However, some researchers have proposed that there may be a one-to-many or a many-to-one relationship. As discussed in Section 2.1, Bhatt (2005) argues that a DP goal may be in a case relationship with one probe and a ϕ relationship with a different probe. Another proposal is found in Hiraiwa’s (2001/2005) Multiple Agree operation, defined in (19).

(19) **MULTIPLE AGREE/MOVE**

MULTIPLE AGREE (multiple feature checking) with a single probe is a single simultaneous syntactic operation; AGREE applies to all the matched goals at the same derivational point derivationally simultaneously. MULTIPLE MOVE (movement of multiple goals) is a simultaneous syntactic operation that applies to all the AGREEd goals. (Hiraiwa 2001, EX 7)

Multiple Agree allows for a probe to be in a relation with more than one goal. The Japanese sentences in (20) contain double nominatives. Since a probe can Agree with more than one goal, T assigns nominative to both the subject and the object in the matrix clause in (20)a and to the subject and object in the embedded clause in (20)b.

(20)  
a. Mary-ga eigo-ga/*wo yoku dekiru.  
\quad Mary-nom English-nom/*acc well do.can.pres
\quad ‘Mary can speak English well.’

\quad John-nom Mary-nom English.nom well do.can.pres comp falsely.belong-past
\quad ‘John falsely believed that Mary can speak English well.’(Hiraiwa 2001, EX 16)
Multiple Agree is formulated to avoid a defective intervention effect. As defined in (21), Chomsky’s (2000) Defective Intervention Constraint is meant to account for instances in which a DP that is seemingly ineligible as a goal for a particular probe interferes with the probe’s ability to Agree with an eligible DP.

(21)  Defective Intervention Constraint  

\[ \alpha > \beta > \gamma \]  

*AGREE (\( \alpha, \gamma \)), \( \alpha \) is a probe and \( \beta \) is a matching goal, and \( \beta \) is inactive due to a prior Agree with some other probe.

According to (19), \( \beta \) and \( \gamma \) would be probed at the same time, and as such, \( \beta \) is not a defective intervener.

Like Hiraiwa (2001/2005), Nomura (2005) also addresses nominative case assignment to objects (in Japanese as well as Icelandic). However, Nomura (2005) argues against Multiple Agree, namely on grounds that the simultaneity condition of Multiple Agree does not apply. It is precisely for this reason that I adopt Nomura’s (2005) operation Sequential Agree, defined in (22).

(22)  Sequential AGREE:  

a. Primary AGREE must take place if there is an active Goal.

b. Subsequent AGREE (if any) takes places if there is an unvalued Goal.

c. AGREE respects Locality.  

(Nomura 2005:27)

While I adopt Sequential Agree, my motivations for doing so are quite different from Nomura’s. On Nomura’s (2005) proposal, the consequence of T probing the dative subject is that the subject necessarily moves to Spec,TP, with probing of the object.
occurring only after this movement. Nomura (2005) provides the allowable word order in Icelandic expletive passives as evidence of this sequence.

(23) a. Það höfðu einhverjum stúdent verið gefnar tölvurnar.

expl had.3pl some student.dat been given the.computers.nom

‘Some student had been given the computers.

b. *Það höfðu verið gefnar einhverjum stúdent tölvurnar.

expl had.3pl been given some student.dat the.computers.nom

‘Some student had been given the computers. (Nomura 2005: 39-40)

Nomura (2005) argues that (23)b is ungrammatical because the dative remains in its base position and T must probe the nominative across the intervening dative. If T probes the dative and nominative simultaneously, per Hiraiwa’s (2001/2005) proposal, (23)b should be allowed. However, if (23)b is the in situ word order, then the indirect object combines with the verb, as opposed to the direct object. I propose that (23)b is out for this reason, not because T probes past the intervening dative. As we will see in the next section, I argue that the expletive occupies Spec,TP. As such, the dative does indeed remain in situ in transitive expletive constructions, and [uNumber] optionally probes past the dative.

In the next section I argue that the degradation in agreement across different types of dative-nominitive constructions in Icelandic provides an argument for Agree applying sequentially. Nomura (2005) adopts the idea that non-structural case-marked DPs have an abstract structural case feature. As such, T probes a dative subject and then continues on to probe a nominative object. Nomura departs from Chomsky (2000) and argues that it is the unvalued case feature on the object that forces T to continue probing, as opposed to T
needing to assign structural case. I depart from both Nomura’s (2005) and Chomsky’s (2000) proposed motivations for probing. I argue that the need of a DP to have case (and person) checked motivates the case probe and the person probe to “attempt” to reach the nominative object and failed attempts result in a crash. By contrast, the need of T to have its number feature valued motivates the number probe to attempt to reach the nominative object. Crucially, though, the failure of the number probe to reach the object does not result in a crash. I depart from Nomura (2005) by proposing the contrast in (24). In essence, a single application of Agree, as shown in (24)a is obligatory, while multiple applications of Agree, as shown in (24)b, are optional.

(24)  a. Agree - Obligatory  
b. Sequential Agree - Optional

As we will see in the next section, the more times Sequential Agree must apply, the less likely it is that [uNumber] will actually probe the nominative object.

### Optional Sequential Agree

The constructions in (25) are sample items from the aforementioned survey and the agreement patterns summarized in (5) are repeated.6

(25)  a. **Intransitive**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ðað slógust/}^*\text{slóst fjórir nemendur á ballinu} \\
\text{there fought.3pl}/^*\text{dft four students.nom at dance.the} \\
\text{‘Four students fought at the dance.’}
\end{align*}
\]
b. **Transitive**  
47% agreement

Sumum gömlum mönnum líkar/líka pípuhattar.

some old men.dat.pl like.dft/3pl top hats.nom.pl

‘Some old men like top hats.’

c. **Transitive Expletive**  
36% agreement

Það líkar/líka sumum gömlum mönnum pípuhattar.

expl like.dft/3pl some old men.dat.pl top hats.nom.pl

‘Some old men like top hats.’

d. **Biclausal Transitive**  
36% agreement

Einum dómara sýndist/sýndust þessar athugasemdir vera óréttlátar.

one judge.dat.sg understood.dft/3pl these comments.nom.pl be unfair

‘One judge understood these comments to be unfair.’

e. **Biclausal Transitive Expletive**  
18% agreement

Það sýndist/sýndust einum dómara þessar athugasemdir vera óréttlátar.

expl understood.dft/3pl one judge.dat.sg these comments.nom.pl be unfair

‘One judge understood these comments to be unfair.’

As shown in (16), and repeated in (25)a, expletive intransitives pattern like constructions with preverbal nominative subjects, with agreement being obligatory. (Only third person DPs can appear in these constructions.) As in Hebrew (discussed in Section 2.3), optional agreement does not arise because the nominative is post-verbal. The issue is the presence of the dative. Since one application of Agree is obligatory, one way to account for (25)a is to assume that [uNumber] necessarily probes the nominative. As there is no intervening
dative, agreement always obtains in these constructions. Another possibility is that \([uNumber]\) probes the expletive because the expletive occupies Spec,TP, and because the expletive and its associate share features, probing the expletive has the same consequence as probing the nominative. Given the degradation in agreement between the transitive constructions and their transitive expletive counterparts, I adopt the latter approach.

Highlighting the difference between the behavior of expletives and topics, Jónsson (1996) convincingly argues that Icelandic expletives do not occupy Spec,CP. First, while \(pað\) appears freely in embedded clauses, embedded topicalization is quite restricted. Jónsson (1996) reports that there is a contrast for most speakers between the sentence in (26)a, in which \(pað\) appears in the embedded clause and the sentence in (26)b, in which the adverb in the embedded clause has been topicalized.

(26) a. Þetta er maðurinn sem \(pað\) var talað við í sjónvarpinu í gær.
   this is the man that there was talked to on the TV yesterday
   (Jónnson 1996, from Rögnvaldsson and Thráinsson 1990:31)

b. *Þetta er maðurinn sem í gær var talað við í sjónvarpinu.
   this is the man that yesterday was talked to on the TV (Jónnson 1996:48)

Second, \(pað\) and theta-marked subjects appear to the right of the main clause complementizer \(ætli\), as in (27)a/b. Topicalized items cannot appear in this position, as shown in (27)c.

(27) a. Ætli \(pað\) verði talað við Jón á morgum?
   wonder there will-be talked to John tomorrow
   ‘Will John be interviewed tomorrow?’
b. Ætli Jón verði talaður víð á morgum?
   wonder John will-be talked to tomorrow
   ‘Will John be interviewed tomorrow?’

c. *Ætli á morgum verði talað við Jón?
   wonder tomorrow will-be talked to John
   ‘Will John be interviewed tomorrow?’ (Jónnson 1996:49)

Third, items can be extracted out of clauses containing það, but not out of clauses in which topicalization has occurred. WH-movement out of the embedded clause in (28)a is allowed, while this movement is blocked in (28)b.

(28) a. Hvenær heldur þú [að það verði talað við Jón t₁]?
   when think you that there will-be talked to John
   ‘When do you think that John will be interviewed?’

b. *Hvenær heldur þú [að við Jón verði talað t₁]?
   when think you that to John will-be talked
   ‘When do you think that John will be interviewed?’ (Jónnson 1996:49)

Jónsson (1996) concludes that expletives occupy Spec,IP and theta-marked subjects occupy Spec,TP. However, given that the presence of the expletive degrades agreement, I propose that the expletive occupies Spec,TP.

In (29), the derivation for (25)a, [uNumber] probes the expletive because it is the closest DP. Since the nominative is the associate of the expletive, the expletive values [uNumber] to [pl], and there is obligatory agreement.
Since there is only one Agree relation required for \([u\text{Number}]\) to be valued in (29), there is obligatory agreement, just as in nominative subject constructions. By contrast, Sequential Agree is necessary for \([u\text{Number}]\) to probe the nominative in the other constructions in (25). In the derivation for (25)b, shown in (30)a, two Agree relations are required in order for \([u\text{Number}]\) to probe the nominative. (See Wood 2012a:262 for a similar analysis in which the dative is merged lower in the structure.) By contrast, in the derivation for (25)c, shown in (30)b, three Agree relations are required. Of course, the derivations shown are not the only grammatical derivations. Since Sequential Agree is optional, \([u\text{Number}]\) may stop probing at any point after the initial Agree relation.
Unlike in (25)a and (29), in transitive expletive constructions with dative subjects, the dative is the associate of the expletive. As shown in (31), only the dative is required to be indefinite in such constructions.

(31) Það mistökst/ mistökust mörgum stúdentum allar tilraunirnar

expl failed.3sg/3pl many students.dat all.nom attempts-the.nom

‘Many students failed all the attempts.’ (based on Sigurðsson 1996, EX51/52b)

Since the dative is the associate, when [uNumber] probes only the expletive or probes the expletive and the dative, the default form surfaces.

There is also a difference in agreement between the non-expletive and expletive biclausal constructions, providing further evidence that [uNumber] probes the expletive. The derivation for (25)d is shown in (32)a, and the derivation for (25)e is shown in (32)b. In these derivations, [uNumber] probes the complement clause (Chomsky 2000, Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008), in addition to probing the dative and the nominative. Consequently, in (32)a three Agree relations are required in order for [uNumber] to probe the nominative, while in (32)b, four Agree relations are required.  

(32) a. $T' = (25)d$

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\text{T[\text{uNum}]} \\
\downarrow \\
\nuP_{\text{Dat}} \\
\downarrow \\
\nu' \\
\downarrow \\
TP \\
\downarrow \\
\text{DP}_{\text{Dat}}[\text{Nom}][\text{pl}] \\
\end{array}
$$

b. $TP = (25)e$

$$
\begin{array}{c}
\text{DP}_{1} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{expl} \\
\downarrow \\
\text{T'[\text{uNum}]} \\
\downarrow \\
\nuP_{\text{Dat}} \\
\downarrow \\
\nu' \\
\downarrow \\
TP \\
\downarrow \\
\text{DP}_{\text{Dat}}[\text{Nom}][\text{pl}] \\
\end{array}
$$
The analysis above illustrates that agreement drops by half when there are two Agree relations, as opposed to one, and again by half when there are four Agree relations as opposed to three. One way to interpret the rate of agreement facts is to argue that they predict that a 50% decrease in agreement every time an additional Agree relation must apply. We would, therefore, expect that three Agree relations would deliver 25% agreement, as opposed to 36%. A larger sample size, and controlling for various verbs might deliver this result. What is clear from the above data, though, is that each application of Sequential Agree leads to a non-trivial, substantial decrease in the rate of agreement.9

My proposal departs from the recent thinking that syntactic relationships are established under c-command only and which is codified in the formulation of Agree. Recent work which echoes the importance of the spec-head relationship includes, in particular, Baker 2008/2011. Baker (2008/2011) proposes that person agreement, unlike gender and number agreement, is established in a spec-head or head-complement configuration.10 While I am reluctant to relax the c-command requirement on Agree, there are conceptual and empirical reasons to do so. Conceptually, in the case literature, a fundamental distinction that is made between structural and non-structural case assignment. As discussed in Section 2.1, structural case is generally analyzed as being assigned under c-command whereas non-structural case need not be. Dative is assigned to the specifier of vP_Dat and ergative is assigned to the specifier of vP_Erg.

Empirically, the presence of the expletive affects agreement, and this effect has been reported in previous literature. As discussed in Section 1, Sigurðsson and Holmberg
argue that there are three agreement dialects with respect to nominative object constructions and for two of these dialects, the expletive is a factor. In one dialect, speakers prefer agreement in non-expletive constructions and allow agreement in expletive constructions. In another dialect, agreement is optional in non-expletive constructions and marginal in expletive constructions. (In the third dialect, agreement is marginal or not acceptable in both types of constructions.) Given Jónsson’s (1996) arguments that expletives do not pattern like topics, we can rule out Spec, CP as the position that the expletive occupies. This does not, however, rule out the possibility that the expletive resides in an intermediate position between Spec, CP and Spec,TP, and this is the position argued for in Jónsson 1996 and Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008. However, if the expletive is outside of the TP projection, then its “interference” with agreement is unexplained. The expletive would not be close enough to T to serve as any sort of intervener.11

3.3 Alternative Approaches

3.3.1 Defective Intervention

Another way to think about the agreement pattern in dative-nominative constructions is to consider the dative a defective intervener, as argued by Holmberg and Hróarsdóttir (2003). Chomsky’s (2000) definition of defective intervention, stated above in (21), is meant to account for instances in which a DP that is seemingly ineligible as a goal for a particular probe interferes with the probe’s ability to Agree with an eligible DP. The exact details of what it means to be defective have been debated in the literature, with some researchers arguing against the concept of defective intervention. (Bobaljik 2008,
Boeckx 2008, Broekhuis 2007). In particular, Broekhuis (2007) proposes that intervening datives that block agreement are actually active. Broekhuis (2007) observes that Dutch constructions with dative interveners do not display the blocking effect that is sometimes found in Icelandic. As shown in (33), the intervening dative does not block agreement between the verb *lijken* ‘seem’ and the post-verbal nominative ‘charts’.

(33) Daarom *lijken Jan/hem de grafieken niet te kloppen*.  
Therefore seem.pl Jan/him.dat the charts.nom.pl not to be-correct

‘Therefore, the charts seem to be wrong to Jan/him.’ (Broekhuis 2007, EX2)

On Broekhuis’s (2007) account, the difference between Icelandic and Dutch is that Icelandic has quirky datives, while Dutch does not, as Dutch does not have dative subjects. Broekhuis (2007) follows Chomsky’s (2000) proposal that quirky case is a theta-related inherent case that also has a structural case feature. Because quirky dative subjects have a structural case feature, they must be in an Agree relation with T. Therefore, quirky subjects in Icelandic are still active when T is merged, even though they have already been assigned non-structural case. By contrast, in Dutch, datives are no longer active when T is merged, so they are not blockers. The blocking effect in Icelandic arises because T probes the dative and cannot go any further. Since datives do not trigger agreement, the features of the dative do not appear on the verb.

This account has more intuitive appeal than a defective intervention account because an active DP is a blocker, as opposed to an inactive DP. However, this analysis does not explain optionality in agreement. In order to reconcile Broekhuis’s (2007) account with the attested optionality, it would have to be that sometimes an active DP is a
blocker and sometimes it is not. Even though the active-inactive distinction might explain the difference between Icelandic and Dutch, such a proposal does not account for the variation that is internal to Icelandic.

3.3.2 Restructuring

One often-discussed contrast is that illustrated between (34), in which agreement is allowed, and (35), in which agreement is not allowed. This contrast is sometimes known as the Schütze-Watanabe contrast (Schütze 1997, Watanabe 1993). Sigurðsson and Holmberg (2008) characterize constructions such as (35) as “low dative intervention.” That is, the dative is in a clause distinct from the matrix verb.

(34) Jóni virðast [tí vera taldir [tí líka hestarnir]]
    J.dat seemed.pl be believed.nom.pl to like horses.nom.pl
    ‘Jon seemed to be believed to like horses.’

(35) Mér *virðast/virðist [Jóni vera taldir [tí líka hestarnir]]
    me.dat *seemed.pl/seemed.dft J.dat be believed.nom.pl to like horses.nom.pl
    ‘I perceive Jon to be believed to like horses.’ (Schütze 1997:108-109)

One notable account of this contrast is found in Bobaljik 2008. On this analysis, the sentence in (34) is optionally restructuring, while the sentence in (35) is necessarily non-restructuring. Restructuring clauses are argued to lack the functional structure necessary to host an overt subject argument (see Wurmbrand 2001 for detailed discussion). Since there is an overt subject, Jóni, in the lower clause in (35) this sentence is non-restructuring.
Restructuring is also the approach adopted by Nomura (2005). Based on earlier observations by Sigurðsson, Nomura (2005) reports that agreement is optional only with an embedded nominative subject, and not with a nominative object. However, as we have seen, this is not the case. Nomura (2005: 121-122) argues that when the embedded clause contains TP, nonfinite T assigns case to the embedded nominative and the matrix verb appears in the default form. However, when the embedded clause does not contain TP, the matrix (finite) T assigns nominative to the embedded subject and the matrix verb agrees with the nominative. While the data that I have presented do not preclude a restructuring analysis, such an account does not explain the impact of an expletive, nor does it account for simplex constructions.

Interestingly, (35) also presents a larger gap in the defective intervention analysis. It is not clear why the dative in (35) would still be active when the higher T is merged. Since the dative is an argument of the lower verb, its quirky feature should be checked in the lower clause, rendering the dative inactive. We, therefore, expect sentences like (35) to behave like the Dutch examples, but it is precisely in these constructions in which there is no optionality; the lower dative necessarily blocks agreement.

3.4 Degraded Agreement in Other Constructions

The analysis proposed in Section 3.2 makes the prediction that agreement will be degraded in other kinds of Icelandic constructions with non-nominative subjects and this prediction is confirmed by certain types of passives and constructions with –st verbs. Ditransitives in Icelandic follow a number of case frames. While the subject is nominative, the indirect and direct objects appear in a variety of dative, accusative, and
genitive combinations. (See Thráinsson 2007 and Zaenen, Maling, and Thráinsson 1985 for a discussion of case and Icelandic passives.) When the indirect object of a verb that has a nom-dat-acc case frame in the active is passivized, the construction is dat-nom. Additionally, Icelandic has a class of verbs that end in –st that have a variety of interpretations. These include middle, reflexive, reciprocal, and inchoative. (See Wood 2012a/b for a thorough discussion of the –st forms.) Results of the same survey show that in both kinds of constructions, agreement is degraded in the expletive version compared to the non-expletive counterpart, as shown in (36) and (37).

(36)  
a. Öllum bornum var /voru gefnar kökur.
    all children.the.dat.pl was.dft/were.3pl given.nom.fem.pl cakes.nom.fem.pl
    ‘All children were given cakes.’ 99% agreement

b. Það var/voru öllum bornum gefnar kökur.
    expl was.dft/were.3pl all.dat children-the.dat.pl given cakes.nom.pl
    ‘All children were given cakes.’ 77% agreement

    (based on Sigurðsson 1996, EX 55)

(37)  
a. Þjófunum fyrirgafst/fyrirgáfust allir glæpirnir.
    thieves-the.dat.pl (were) forgiven.dft/3pl all crimes.the.nom.pl
    ‘Thieves were forgiven all crimes.’ 84% agreement

b. Það fyrirgafst/fyrirgáfust þjófunum allir glæpirnir.
    expl (were) forgiven.dft/3pl thieves.the.dat.pl all crimes.the.nom.pl
    ‘Thieves were forgiven all crimes.’ 75% agreement

    (based on Thráinsson 2007, ex 4.158a/5.98)
In both (36) and (37), agreement is substantially higher than in the active dat-nom constructions, and I leave the motivation for this for future research. The analysis of the -st constructions is the same as shown in (30); [uNumber] optionally probes the nominative. (Also see Wood 2012a:262 for a similar analysis in which the dative is generated lower.) The analysis for both the expletive and non-expletive versions of the passives in (36) are complicated by the fact that the participle agrees with the nominative in both constructions, and I leave that for future research as well. The important point is that, like in active dat-nom constructions, the presence of the expletive degrades agreement in passives and –st constructions.

In the next section, I illustrate how optional Sequential Agree accounts for the general restriction against [1/2] nominative objects and also how Sequential Agree licenses these objects in very particular circumstances.

4 Person – Number Asymmetries

4.1 The Person Restriction

As in many languages, Icelandic restricts the contexts in which first and second person DPs may appear. Icelandic constructions with [1][2] nominative objects are (usually) ungrammatical, as shown in (38). The Person Restriction in Icelandic has been characterized in various ways, and one description is stated in (39).

(38) *Henni leiddist við/þið.

her.dat bored.3sg we.nom.pl/you.nom.pl

‘She found us/you boring.’
In Dat-Nom constructions, only third person Nom may control agreement.

(Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008, EX 3)

In this section, I show that a combination of both syntactic and morphological factors accounts for the Person Restriction in Icelandic. Evidence that the Person Restriction is, in part, morphological comes from syncretism. [1/2] nominative objects are allowed when the agreeing form of the verb is syncretic with the default form, as noted in Sigurðsson (1996) and Sigurðsson and Holmberg (2008). Evidence that the Person Restriction is, in part, syntactic comes from the fact that 1/2 nominative objects are not in allowed in nonfinite clauses. As pointed out by Nomura (2005), 1/2 nominative objects are not allowed in raising, control, or ECM infinitives, as shown in (40). (Also see Taraldsen 1995 for a discussion of nominative objects in Icelandic infinitives.)


   ‘It seems to John that Bjarni likes me/us/you.’

   Raising

   b. Við vonumst til að leiðast hún/*þið ekki.

   ‘We hope not to be bored with her/*you.

   Control

   c. Æg taldi Jóni líka *ég/*við/*þið.

   ‘I believed John to like me/us/you.”

   (Nomura 2005, EX 101)

   ECM

If the issue were only the morphological expression of agreement, we would expect [1/2] nominative objects in infinitives, since nonfinite verbs in Icelandic do not agree.
In illustrating how Sequential Agree accounts for the Person Restriction, I comment on previous proposals which also address the difference between person and number features. I highlight the analyses found in Anagnostopoulou 2005, Baker 2008, Preminger 2011b, and Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008.

4.2 The Person Restriction and the PCC: Anagnostopoulou 2005

As is well-known, the PCC captures the fact that in many languages, first and second person phonologically weak direct objects, i.e. clitics, cannot co-occur with phonologically weak indirect objects of any person. As stated in (41), if there is a phonologically weak indirect object, the direct object must be third person.

(41) Person Case Constraint

a. In a combination of a direct object and an indirect object (clitic, agreement marker, or weak pronoun), the direct object has to be third person.

b. Both the direct object and the indirect object are phonologically weak.

(Bonet 1991:177)

Greek is one language which displays PCC effects. In (42)a/b, the indirect object clitics (genitive) are first and second person, respectively, and the direct object clitic (accusative) is third person. Conversely, in the sentences in (42)c/d, the direct object clitics are first and second person, respectively, and these cannot co-occur with an indirect object clitic.

(42) a. Tha mu to stilune
    fut cl.gen.sg.1 cl.acc.sg.3.neut send.3.pl
    ‘They will send it to me.’
Anagnostopoulou (2005) proposes a unified analysis of the PCC and the Icelandic Person Restriction. The essence of the proposal is that an object DP fails to be case licensed when the same head checks person and number against different goals. In (43), F is T in Icelandic and v in PCC languages.13

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{FP} \\
\text{F}_{[\text{Person,Number}]} \quad \text{XP} \\
\text{DP}_{[\text{Dat}/\text{Gen}]} \quad \text{X'} \\
\text{X} \quad \text{...ZP} \\
\text{DP} \quad \text{[Acc, Nom]} \quad \text{(based on Anagnostopoulou 2005, EX 23)}
\end{array}
\]

On this analysis, structural case-assigning heads behave the same way; both T and v have \(\varphi\)-features that need to be valued. While T gets features from the nominative DP, v gets features from the accusative DP (since v assigns accusative). Both heads probe the closest DP that they c-command. T in Icelandic probes the dative and v in Greek probes the
genitive. While the number values of DPs bearing non-structural case are not accessible to T, these DPs value [person] to default. The head continues to probe past the non-structural case-assigned DP because the head needs a value for number. When T probes the nominative in Icelandic and \(v\) probes the accusative in Greek, the derivation crashes. Following Chomsky (1995/2000/2001), Anagnostopoulou (2005) adopts the proposal that structural case-assignment is a consequence of \(\phi\)-feature checking. When T/\(v\) probes the direct object, the object cannot get case. Since the person feature on T/\(v\) has already been valued to default, the person feature on the direct object cannot be checked. “Assuming that Case checking takes place only when there is complete phi-checking, it follows that pronouns entering Case-checking cannot have phi-features that remain unchecked.” (Anagnostopoulou 2005:212) Since third person DPs do not have a person feature that needs to be checked, these DPs get case, and are, therefore, always allowed.

However, if complete \(\phi\)-feature checking is required for case assignment, then we expect verbs to always agree with third person plural nominative objects. Anagnostopoulou’s (2005) argument is motivated, in part, by the idea that “[number] agreement with Nominative objects is by and large obligatory” (Anagnostopoulou 2005:209), as noted in Sigurðsson (1996). However, as observed in Sigurðsson and Holmberg (2008) and in this paper, agreement with nominative objects is, indeed, optional.

Anagnostopoulou’s (2005) account also predicts that [1]/[2] nominative objects should always be disallowed, since they should not be able to get case under any circumstance. However, there is a particular circumstance in which these DPs are
licensed. First and second person nominative objects are allowed when the agreeing and non-agreeing verb forms are syncretic. Both the 3rd singular and the 1st singular forms for ‘bored’ are leiddist, and as shown in (44), the first person nominative object is allowed.

(44) Henni leiddist ég.

her.dat bored.1sg/3sg I.nom.1sg

‘She found me boring.’ (Sigurðsson 1996:33/ Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008:23)

While Anagnostopoulou’s (2005) analysis does give rise to predictions that are not confirmed, her proposal does employ a difference between person and number features that is found throughout the literature. On her analysis, a DP with non-structural case values person to default, but does not value number at all. A similar idea is proposed in Taraldsen (1995). Another person-number asymmetry is found in Alexiadou 2003, which argues that Tense checks Person, while Aspect checks Number. Sigurðsson and Holmberg (2008) and Preminger (2011) argue that person and number are separate heads, and in Sections 4.3 and 4.4, we will see that both analyses implicitly argue that person is privileged with respect to number. In Section 4.4, we will also see that the proposal found in Baker (2008), which argues that person agreement is subject to stricter locality conditions than number (or gender) agreement, fails to account for optional number agreement.

4.3 Person and Number as Separate Heads: Sigurðsson and Holmberg (2008)

Sigurðsson and Holmberg’s (2008) proposal, like the analysis in this paper, addresses both the licensing of nominative objects and agreement optionality. Sigurðsson and Holmberg (2008) propose that Person and Number are separate heads, with each being
distinct from T. The dative is merged lower than Person and Number, and higher than the nominative, as shown in (45).

\[(45) \quad [\text{CP} \ldots \text{Topic} \ldots \text{Finiteness} \ldots [\text{TP Person} \ldots \text{Number} \ldots \text{T} \ldots \ldots \text{Dat} \ldots \text{Nom}]]\]

(Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008, EX 17)

The proposal is grounded in derivational timing. The dative subject moves to a position higher than the Person and Number heads. However, the dative may move before or after those heads probe the nominative. The core of Sigurðsson and Holmberg’s (2008) analysis is shown in (46)/(47). In (46) an intervening dative blocks Person from probing a [1]/[2] nominative object and the derivation crashes because the person feature is not checked.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{***} \\
(46) \quad \text{*Person Number Dative Nominative } [1/2] \quad 1/2 \text{ DP not allowed}
\end{array}
\]

By contrast, when an intervening dative blocks Number from probing a plural nominative, the derivation does not crash. As shown in (47)a, an intervening dative forces the default form to be realized. However, in (47)b the dative does not intervene, the Number probe Agrees with the nominative, resulting in verbal agreement.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{***} \\
(47) \quad \text{a. Per Num Dat Nom}_{[\text{pl}]} \text{ default} \quad \text{b. Dat Per Num Dat Nom}_{[\text{pl}]} \text{ agreement}
\end{array}
\]

The crucial insight from Sigurðsson and Holmberg’s (2008) analysis is that there is not variation with respect to (46). While the failure to check number results in the default form, the failure to check person results in ungrammaticality. Building on this insight, I propose that nominatives bearing [1]/[2] must be in an Agree relation with [\text{\mu} \text{Person}]
while nominatives bearing [pl] need not be in a relationship with [uNumber]. In this respect, person behaves like case in that an Agree relation with the appropriate probe is required. Since third person DPs lack a person value, these DPs are not required to be in an Agree relation with [uPerson]. Hence, constructions with third person nominative objects are always grammatical. In the next section I provide an analysis which incorporates both Sequential Agree and the Person Licensing Condition proposed in Preminger 2011b.

4.4 Analysis of [1]/[2] Nominative Objects

In the spirit of the previously discussed proposals, Preminger (2011b) also observes that person and number agreement pattern differently and argues that person agreement tends to require a more local relationship than number agreement, but argues against the strict locality condition encapsulated in Baker’s (2008) Structural Condition on Person Agreement (SCOPA), defined in (48).

(48) Structural Condition on Person Agreement (SCOPA): A functional category F can bear the features +1 or +2 if and only if a projection of F merges with an NP that has that feature, and F is taken as the label for the resulting phrase.

(Baker 2008:52)

The consequence of SCOPA is that person agreement obtains only in a spec-head or spec-complement position. SCOPA is designed to account for a widely-observed difference between verbal items and adjectival items, namely that the former may show person agreement while the latter do not. Baker proposes that this is because TP projects a specifier, while AP does not.
Using “long-distance” person agreement in Basque, Preminger 2011b argues for a “weakened” version of SCOPA. Preminger (2011b) shows that in (49), the embedded object *ni* ‘me’ remains in the embedded clause even though it triggers agreement on the matrix auxiliary, indicated by *na*.

(49) Ni altxa-tze-n probatu [na-Ø-u-te]aux
me.ABS lift-NMZ-LOC attempted 1.ABS-sg.ABS-√3pl.ERG

‘They attempted to lift me.’

(subject is *pro* <3pl.ERG>)

(Preminger 2011b, EX 4)

As such, Preminger (2011b) proposes the Person Licensing Condition, defined in (50).

(50) *Person Licensing Condition*: A 1st/2nd-person pronoun in the same clause as a person *φ*-probe must be agreed with by that *φ*-probe. (Preminger 2011, EX 26)

With respect to (49), Preminger proposes that the phase (lower clause) ceases to be a boundary when it is probed by the *φ*-probe in the higher clause. I argue that the Person Licensing Condition is also at work in monoclausal and biclausal Icelandic constructions.

Given that [*uPerson*] must probe a [1]/[2] nominative, (50) rules out the derivation in (51) for the sentence in (38). Because [*uPerson*] probes only the dative, [*Person*] on the nominative is left unchecked. [*uNumber*] may or may not probe the nominative, but the failure of [*uPerson*] to probe the nominative results in ungrammaticality.

(51) * T [Nom] DP [Dat] DP [Nom]
    [uPerson] [Person=1/2] [Number= pl]

Since Sequential Agree is available and optional, [*uPerson*] may probe both the dative and the nominative. Since [*Person*] on the nominative is checked, we would expect
that derivation to license a [1]/[2] nominative object, and for (38) to be grammatical. I propose that \[uPerson\] may indeed probe both the subject and object DPs. However, derivations such as (52)a are ruled out at the point of vocabulary insertion because there are conflicting values for \[Person\].

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Agree} [u\text{Person}, \text{dative}] \rightarrow [\text{default}] \\
\text{Agree} [u\text{Person}, \text{nominative}] \rightarrow [1/2]
\end{array}
\]

Adopting the proposal that datives assign a default value for \[Person\] and no value for \[Number\], in (52)b \[u\text{Person}\] is valued to [default] by the dative and to [1]/[2] by the nominative. In order to insert a vocabulary item, there must be a form which realizes these different person values. Crucially, the dative does not value \[u\text{Number}\] to default.

Unlike [1]/[2] nominative objects, plural nominative objects do not force a feature clash.

This proposal predicts that if there is a way to realize all of the values for \[u\text{Person}\] that result from Sequential Agree relations, constructions with [1]/[2] nominative objects should be grammatical. As we saw in (44), this prediction is, indeed, confirmed. Sigurðsson and Holmberg (2008) explain the pattern in (44) by proposing the Syncretism Generalization, stated in (53).

(53) For most speakers, no Person Restriction arises in Dat-Nom constructions if, for morphological (paradigmatic) reasons, the ‘would be’ first or second person agreeing form is homophonous with the third person (in the same number).

(Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008, EX 55)
In order to derive (53), Sigurðsson and Holmberg (2008) propose that Person probing can happen after person and number have raised to T and the Tense/Number/Person bundle probes both the dative and the nominative. Since the dative values person to third, the derivation converges when probing the nominative results in a verbal form that does not conflict with the third person form. As in my analysis, the Person Restriction arises from a morphological feature clash.

The idea that the dative values Person to default is not uncontroversial. In particular, Baker (2008) takes issue with the stipulation that dative subjects value the person feature on T to default (or that dative subjects are devoid of person features), especially given that non-third person dative subjects are allowed, as illustrated in (54).

(54) Mér líkar/*líka bókin.

me.dat like.3sg/*1pl book.the.nom

‘I like the book.’ (Baker 2008, EX 38, found in Taraldsen 1995:310)

On Baker’s (2008) account, the dative cannot be agreed with because it is no longer active at the point when T probes (because the dative has already been assigned case). Therefore, T probes the nominative, but because the nominative does not occupy the specifier of the agreeing head, T, person agreement cannot obtain. What is not clear is why an analysis similar to the one Baker (2008) proposes for person agreement with objects in Swahili (p.54) could not apply to Icelandic. On this proposal, v projects two specifiers, with the object occupying one of those and v being the agreeing head. We would, therefore, expect, a similar kind of structure to be available for Icelandic.
4.5 Analysis of [1]/[2] Embedded Nominative Subjects

Unlike [1]/[2] nominative objects, embedded nominative subjects can bear [1/2] values, but they do not (usually) agree, as shown in (55).

(55) Honum mundi/*mundum virðast við (vera) hæfir.

him.dat would.dft/*1pl seem we.nom.pl (be) competent

‘We would seem competent to him.’ (Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008, EX 7/8a)

I propose that [uPerson] on the embedded T necessarily probes the embedded nominative subject, since no dative intervenes.

(56) a. T [+finite] DP[Dat] [T[-finite] DP[Nom]]
    [uPerson]👇 [uPerson] [Person=1/2]

b. T [+finite] DP[Dat] [T[-finite] DP[Nom]]
    [uPerson]👇 [uPerson] [Person=1/2]

Of course, [uPerson] on finite T probes the dative matrix subject. Since Sequential Agree is optional, [uPerson] on finite T may also probe the embedded nominative, as shown in (56)b. When [uPerson] probes both the dative and the nominative, [uPerson] acquires both a default person value, as well as the person value of the nominative. The Sequential Agree derivation is ruled out at vocabulary insertion unless there is syncretism. As such, the only allowable derivation for (55) is (56)a. The derivation in (56)b fails because there is no way to realize all of the features for [Person]. By contrast, in the sentence (57), the matrix verb optionally agrees with the embedded subject because both derivations in (56) are allowed.

(57) Henni virtist/ virtust þið eithvað einkennilegir.

her.dat seemed.dft/2-3.pl you.nom.pl somewhat strange

‘You seemed somewhat strange to her.’ (Sigurðsson and Holmberg 2008, EX 50a)
When (56)a applies, the default form of the matrix verb surfaces. When (56)b applies, 
[uPerson] is valued to [default] by the dative and to [2] by the nominative. Because

**virtust** realizes both the default person plural and the second plural, agreement with the
nominative subject is allowed.

Returning to the ungrammaticality of [1/2] nominative objects in the non-finite contexts in (40), the presence of the embedded dative subject in (40)a/c rules out the possibility that the embedded clause is restructuring and we can assume that (40)b is also non-restructuring. Furthermore, unlike the constructions in (19)d/e and the construction in (55), the nominative is not at the edge of the lower clause in (40). Therefore, the nominative can only be probed by the features on non-finite T. If Sequential Agree fails to apply, the person value on the nominative is unchecked and if Sequential Agree applies, there is a feature clash with the dative and the nominative, assuming that the
infinitival form is a kind of default. The question arises as to why non-finite T contains φ-probes, even though non-finite verbs in Icelandic do not show agreement. As has been
well-established, notably in Sigurðsson 1991/2008, there is evidence that Icelandic PRO bears case. (Landau 2000/2004/2006 also provides evidence that PRO bears case in a
variety of languages.) As such, we have reason to believe that Icelandic has an “enriched” non-finite T. Drawing on this idea, I propose that non-finite T has unvalued φ features, just as it has a valued case feature.

To summarize my proposal, constructions with [1]/[2] nominative objects are
generally ungrammatical irrespective of whether Agree or Sequential Agree applies. If
[uPerson] probes only the dative, the unchecked person value of the object DP leads to a
syntactic crash. If \([u\text{Person}]\) probes both the dative and the nominative, conflicting person values lead to a morphological crash, unless there is a form which realizes both [default] and the person value of the nominative.

5 Case and Agreement at PF: An Argument Against

Much recent research argues that case and agreement features are determined post-syntactically, at PF. The general motivation for this argument is the idea that syntactic derivations should contain only information that is interpretable at the semantics interface. Highlighting the complexities and idiosyncrasies of Icelandic case and agreement patterns, Sigurðsson (2006b) argues that both types of features should be determined post-syntactically. This section explores how a post-syntactic analysis might account for the Icelandic agreement facts under discussion. I show that the systematic degradation of agreement presents a serious challenge for a PF account.

While in the Distributed Morphology models proposed in Halle and Marantz (1993) and Embick and Noyer (2007), both case and agreement are established post-syntactically, the algorithm that establishes these features makes reference to reference the syntactic structure. In essence, post-syntactic operations “see” the syntax. One post-syntactic case algorithm that makes crucial reference to the syntax is detailed in McFadden (2004/2007), which argues that nominative is necessarily a default case and is realized only when another case value could not be realized. In nominative-accusative case systems, McFadden proposes that Accusative is realized on a DP only if it is c-commanded by a DP that is merged in Spec,\(\nu\text{P}\). One of McFadden’s goals is to explain
case dependencies – the fact that accusative and ergative generally appear in the presence of nominative and absolutive, respectively.

The crucial point of McFadden’s (2004/2007) analysis is that nominative is never actually licensed; a DP is spelled out with nominative only if another case value could not be spelled-out. In dative-nominative constructions in Icelandic, nominative surfaces on the object because the right structural conditions for accusative do not exist. Dative subjects are merged in Spec, vPappl, which occupies the same position as vPDat on my analysis. However, since case information is not available in the syntax, the v head in McFadden’s proposal is not specified for dative case. The important point is that because there is no vP in dative subject constructions, no DP can be merged in its specifier. Consequently, accusative cannot surface on the object.

Though not explicitly cast in a DM model, Bobaljik (2008) builds on McFadden’s (2004/2007) proposal that case is post-syntactic, and argues that agreement is as well. His argument is that since agreement is dependent on case, and since case is determined post-syntactically, agreement must also be. Bobaljik’s (2008) core agreement generalization is stated in (58).

(58) The controller of agreement on the finite verbal complex (Infl+V) is the highest accessible NP in the domain of Infl +V. (Bobaljik’s 2008, EX 3)

Crucially, accessibility is determined by morphological case. Therefore, in Icelandic, nominatives are accessible, while datives are not, and as we saw in Hindi (which Bobaljik 2008 also discusses), ergatives are not accessible.
In Embick and Noyer’s (2007) model, an AGR node is merged to T and copies the features of some DP. We could take Bobaljik’s (2008) agreement generalization as an “instruction” to AGR. The problem, of course, is that AGR needs to always copy the features of the nominative when it occupies Spec,TP and only sometimes copy the features of the nominative when it does not occupy Spec,TP. The DM model does provide a mechanism that could potentially be employed here. Impoverishment (notably discussed in Bonet 1991 in the context of explaining PCC effects) deletes some subset of features from a feature bundle before a vocabulary item is inserted. We might imagine an algorithm akin to that in (59), with steps (1)-(3) based largely on McFadden’s (2004) algorithm.

(59) PF Case and Agreement Algorithm for Icelandic.
   a. Step 1: If a DP is merged Spec,\(\_vP\)\(_{[\text{Appl}]}\), spell that DP out as dative.
   b. Step 2: If a DP is c-commanded by another DP that was merged in Spec,\(\_vP\), spell that DP out as accusative.
   c. Step 3: Spell out any remaining DP as nominative.
   d. Step 4: AGR merges to T and copies the features of the highest DP that is spelled out as nominative.
   e. Step 5: If the nominative DP was not merged in Spec,\(\_vP\), Impoverishment may delete the features of the nominative. The more structural distance there is between T and the nominative, the more likely it is that Impoverishment will apply.
The imprecision of Step 5 is what makes the post-syntactic account unappealing. The alternative is to have the algorithm stop at either Step 3 or Step 4. Instead of Impoverishment sometimes applying, the features of the nominative would only sometimes be copied. Again, it is not clear how to make the systematic degradation in agreement fall out naturally from the system. Something akin to Sequential Agree would have to apply at PF. Since Agree is an independently motivated syntactic operation, a post-syntactic analog to it would be redundant.

7 Conclusion and Questions for Future Research

It is worth noting that the analysis argued for in this paper accounts for variability throughout a population, and ideally, an analysis which captures the grammars of individuals is needed. Sigurðsson and Holmberg’s (2008) account achieves this by categorizing speakers into agreement dialects. My research does not confirm the existence of discreet agreement dialects, and a recent large-scale investigation of optional agreement conducted through the University of Iceland has also failed to find evidence of discernible dialects. (Jóhannes Gísli Jónsson, pc) Excluding passives and –st constructions, three patterns do, however, emerge from my findings. First, approximately 8% (5 out of 61) of participants preferred non-agreement in all constructions. These speakers never selected the agreeing form of the verb. I take this to indicate that for these speakers, \([u\text{Number}]\) does not enter into Sequential Agree relations. Crucially, since Sequential Agree is required for nominative case assignment in these constructions, it cannot be that there is a general Sequential Agree parameter. Second, just under 12% (7 out of 61) of the participants allowed agreement in dative-verb-nominative constructions
only. I take this to indicate these speakers only allow Sequential Agree to apply only once. Third, approximately 28% (17 out of 61) of participants allow agreement in biclausal expletive constructions. This suggests that for these speakers Sequential Agree is allowed to apply freely. Crucially, though, only two speakers in this category consistently prefer agreement in this type of construction, underscoring the optionality of Sequential Agree. Even speakers who freely allow Sequential Agree do so only optionally.

Additionally, as discussed in Section 3.4, agreement in the expletive passive constructions and the expletive –st constructions is substantially higher than agreement in the active monoclausal expletive dat-nom constructions – 75% versus 36%. Further, agreement in the non-expletive dat-nom –st construction is 84% versus 47% agreement in the active dat-nom construction. Taken together, these patterns suggest that if there are agreement dialects, they are more nuanced and more construction-particular than Sigurðsson and Holmberg’s (2008) proposal suggests.

In this paper, I have illustrated not only that agreement with nominative objects is optional in Icelandic, but also that agreement varies systematically. In accounting for these data, I have argued that Sequential Agree is an optional operation and shown that this proposal has the additional benefit of accounting for the both the Person Restriction and the unexpected grammaticality of first and second person nominative objects only in the contexts in which the agreeing and default verb forms are syncretic. Finally, I have illustrated that the data examined in this paper suggest a syntactic account of agreement, as opposed to a post-syntactic one.
References


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1 Holmberg and Hróarsdóttir’s (2003) analysis is meant to account for the observation that a WH trace blocks agreement while an NP trace does not, shown in (i) – (iii).

(i) a. Mér virðast t_{NP} [hestarnir vera seinir].
   me.dat seem.pl the-horses.nom be slow
   ‘It seems to me that the horses are slow.’
   b. Það virðist/*virðast einhverjum manni [hestarnir vera seinir].
   expl seem.sg/*pl some man.dat the-horses.nom be slow
   ‘It seems to some man that the horses are slow.’ (H&H 2003, EX 1-2)

(ii) Hvaða manni veist þú að virðist/*virðast t_{WH} [hestarnir vera seinir]
   which man.dat know you that seem.sg/*pl the-horses.nom be slow
   ‘To which man do you know that the horses seem to be slow?’ (H&H 2003, EX 3)

(iii) a. *Hestarnir virðast mér [t_{NP} vera seinir].
   horses-the seem.pl me.dat be slow
   b. Hverjum hafa hestarnir virst t_{WH} [t_{NP} vera seinir].
   who.dat have.pl horses-the.nom seemed be slow (H & H 2003, EX 4-5)

2 The survey (a forced-choice task) was conducted in September 2008. Participants were students at the University of Iceland. Speakers were given sentences displaying the
default and agreeing forms of verbs and asked to select which form they would likely use in casual conversation. In retrospect, it would have perhaps been more informative to ask speakers to rate the acceptability of constructions exhibiting agreement and those not exhibiting agreement. This would have allowed for clearer conclusions to be drawn about which derivations speakers actually allow.

3 The difference between the rates of agreement in standard word order and the expletive counterpart is statistically significant. For both monoclausal and biclausal constructions, p < .05.

4 Bhatt (2005) also discusses the fact that the infinitival verb agrees with the embedded object only in LDA. Bhatt (2005) proposes a process of covaluation, in which the φ-features of the infinitival verb are valued along with the features of the matrix verb.

5 Nomura (2005) also proposes that as long as the probing head is highest in the derivation, Agree is not counter-cyclic.

6 One caveat is in order. While transitive expletive constructions are grammatical in Icelandic, prescriptively, they are dispreferred. (Einar Freyr Sigurðsson, p.c.) This prescriptivism may affect how likely speakers are to use the expletive construction in naturally-occurring speech, but it is not clear that this would affect the choice of verb form.

7 The examples are based on those appearing throughout Thráinsson 2007 and were constructed in consultation with Jóhannes Gísli Jónsson. The percentage reflects the rate of agreement for items of this particular type, not the token shown.
I leave open the possibility that case assignment may be parasitic on number agreement, which would be consistent with the idea that case checking is a consequence of $\varphi$-feature checking. On this proposal, when $T$ fails to probe the object, the verb appears with default agreement and nominative surfaces on the object by default. Given the evidence that case and agreement behave semi-autonomously in a variety of languages, I argue that the analysis in which [nom] and [uNumber] probe independently is the better option.

My analysis is similar in spirit to the one found in Adger (2006). Adger provides an analysis of was/were variability in a Scottish English dialect spoken in Buckie, Scotland. With some Nominative pronouns – the 1st plural and the 2nd singular and plural – agreement of the past tense copula is optional, as shown in (iv).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nominative Pronoun</th>
<th>Verb form allowed</th>
<th>Nominative Pronoun</th>
<th>Verb form allowed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(iv) 1st singular: I</td>
<td>was</td>
<td>2nd plural: you</td>
<td>was/were</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st plural: we</td>
<td>was/were</td>
<td>3rd singular: he/she/it</td>
<td>was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd singular: you</td>
<td>was/were</td>
<td>3rd plural: they</td>
<td>were</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adger 2006: 513)

While my analysis ties the morphological output to syntactic operations, Adger (2006) proposes that the optionality arises from the feature composition of the pronouns and the copula. Like my proposal, though, Adger’s (2006) also makes predictions about the rate at which various forms are found.

Also see Koopman 2006 for a discussion of spec-head agreement.
Unfortunately, I do not at present have data illustrating whether an adverb has the same effect on agreement as the expletive. Since Icelandic is V2, a sentence-initial adverb would deliver the same word order. If adverbs degrade agreement in the same way as *það*, this would suggest that probing Spec,TP is not the issue. However, if there is no difference in agreement between adverb/non-adverb minimal pairs, this would strengthen the proposal that *það* occupies Spec,TP and is the initial goal of an Agree relation.

With the exception of one speaker for one item, speakers never selected the default for the auxiliary passives.

While I focus on the analysis found in Anagnostopoulou 2005, there are other accounts which unify the PCC and the Person Restriction. For instance, Rezac 2008 compares Icelandic and Basque.

It should be noted that the idea of a morphological clash is at odds with Elsewhere Condition (cite) of the Distributed Morphology framework. According to the Elsewhere Condition, a derivation does not crash at morphological spell-out because a language will realize as much of a feature bundle as possible.