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## OV WORD ORDER IN ICELANDIC

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### 0. Introduction

The word order of Modern Icelandic has been a widely discussed matter during the last few years.\* The beginning of this discussion can be traced back to Höskuldur Thráinsson's dissertation *On Complementation in Icelandic*, from 1979. Joan Maling and Annie Zaenen have also written a number of papers on the subject. However, I think it is fair to say that the ongoing discussion actually started with Christer Platzack's paper which appeared in 1983, in the series *Working Papers in Scandinavian Syntax*. The reason for claiming this is that Platzack's paper was the first to be written within the Government and Binding framework, which originated in Chomsky's works from around 1980. Since Platzack's paper, a number of papers on this subject have appeared, all of them assuming some version of the GB-framework. Those who have written these papers include for instance Christer Platzack, Anders Holmberg, Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson, Höskuldur Thráinsson, and myself.

The discussion has centered around the role of verb movement in deriving the verb-second word order typical of most of the Germanic languages. All the above-mentioned authors agree that in sentences without an auxiliary verb, the main verb must move from its base generated position inside the VP to the INFL(ection)-position, where it merges with the tense and agreement features of the sentence.

There has been much less discussion of the word order in the verb phrase, the relative order of objects, adverbials, verbal particles etc. This is perhaps to be expected. Nobody doubts that Modern Icelandic is a VO-language, and that objects usually follow their governing verbs, instead of preceding them. True enough, many examples of OV-order can be found in Old Icelandic (cf. Sigurðsson 1983), which is perhaps not surprising, since its ancestor, Indo-European, is often claimed to have had SOV as its basic word order. It is also possible that the same is valid for Proto-Germanic and Proto-Norse (cf. Sigurðsson 1985). (1) is an example of an Old Icelandic OV-sentence (from *Njáls saga*, quoted from Sigurðsson 1983:193; the spelling is normalized):

- (1) Að vér ... myndum þetta gert hafa  
That we ... would this done have 'that we would have done this'

It is clear that OV was not the basic word order of Old Icelandic, but the relationship between sentences like (1) and normal VO-sentences is uncertain. Karen Kossuth (e.g. 1978), Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson (1983, 1985) and Þorsteinn G. Indriðason (1987) are the only ones who have speculated on this matter, as far as I know. Sigurðsson (1983:194) first put forth the (rather tentative) proposal that Old Icelandic had two PS-rules for the VP; one which gave VO-order, and another which gave OV-order. However, he has later given up this claim; he now (1985) thinks that Old Icelandic had already become a true VO language. This means that the OV-sentences we find in Old Icelandic texts must be derived by means of extensive leftward

movement rules.

Recently, Indriðason (1987) has made a count of OV-sentences in 18 texts, from the 13th through the 19th century. He found out that there is only a slight decrease in the frequency of OV-sentences up to the 19th century, where the frequency appears to drop rapidly. Indriðason thinks that the relatively high frequency of OV-sentences in this period indicates that Icelandic had in fact two systems during all those years; an OV-base with extensive rightward movement and a VO-base with nearly as extensive leftward movement. Even though Indriðason's arguments are not uncontroversial, it is clear that the debate of the basic word order in the VP in Icelandic is far from settled.

## 1. Preposing of quantifiers

Sentences like (1) have "pure" OV-order (except for the position of the finite verb); i.e., not only does the object precede the auxiliaries, but the order of the auxiliary verbs is also inverted, compared to the modern word order. Such sentences would be impossible in Modern Icelandic. However, one type of OV-sentences is still perfectly grammatical in Modern Icelandic. This type is exemplified in (2)-(4):

- (2) Jón getur [NP ekkert]<sub>i</sub> gert \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
John can nothing do  
'John can't do anything'
- (3) Jón hefur [NP engum]<sub>i</sub> hjálpað \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
John has nobody helped  
'John hasn't helped anyone'
- (4) Jón mun [NP einskis]<sub>i</sub> sakna \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
John will nobody miss  
'John isn't going to miss anyone'

*ekkert*, *engum* and *einskis* are different forms of the word *enginn* 'nobody', which is usually classified as an indefinite pronoun. There is hardly any doubt that these words bear the role of an object in (2)-(4). The verbs *gera* 'do', *hjálpa* 'help', and *sakna* 'miss' all subcategorize for an object; (5)-(7) are ill-formed:

- (5) \*Jón getur gert \_\_\_\_  
'John can do'
- (6) \*Jón hefur hjálpað \_\_\_\_  
'John has helped'
- (7) \*Jón mun sakna \_\_\_\_  
'John will miss'

Furthermore, *gera* takes an accusative object, *hjálpa* takes the dative, and *sakna* takes the genitive; this conforms with the different forms of *enginn* in (2)-(4). Thus, it appears that we have here genuine examples of preverbal objects in modern Icelandic.

The question is now whether we can find anything similar in the other modern

Scandinavian languages. And indeed we can; for instance, Diderichsen (1946:187) mentions that negative phrases always stand in this position in Danish, even if they are objects:

- (8) Jeg havde ingen penge faaet den dag  
I had no money got that day  
'I hadn't got any money that day'

And Christensen (1986:28) has the following sentence from Norwegian:

- (9) Jon har ingen romaner lest  
John has no novels read  
'John hasn't read any novels'

*ingen* in Norwegian corresponds to the Icelandic *enginn*. Christensen (1986:28) says that this sentence is stylistically marked in Norwegian, and will not be accepted by all speakers. In Icelandic, however, the corresponding sentence is completely normal.

Christensen (1986:23) points out the following descriptive generalization:

- (10) *Ingen* may appear in all and only the positions where the distributional constraints on *ikke*, 'not', and *noen*, 'any(one)', may simultaneously be satisfied.

Christensen's explanation for the behaviour of *ingen* in Norwegian rests on the following claim (1986:21):

- (11) The lexical item *ingen* is a post-syntactic amalgam of a pro-clitic negative particle and an existential quantifier, which may also be lexicalized as *ikke* 'not', and *noen*, 'anyone', respectively.

Christensen points out that etymologically, *enginn/ingen* is derived from Old Norse *né-einn-gi*, where *né* is a negative particle, *einn* = 'one', and *gi* is a generalizing suffix.

In sentences like (9), Christensen claims that we must assume what she calls "noen-movement", which moves *noen* from post-verbal to pre-verbal position. Thus, *ikke* and *noen* become adjacent, and can be replaced by *ingen*.

But can this be used to explain the behaviour of *enginn* in Icelandic? That does not seem to be the case. The prediction that *enginn* should only occur in the positions where *ekki neinn* 'not anyone' can be adjacent is not borne out in Icelandic, as (12)-(14) show:

- (12) a Ég hef *engan* séð  
I have nobody seen  
'I haven't seen anybody'  
b ??Ég hef *ekki neinn* séð  
I have not anybody seen  
'I haven't seen anybody'
- (13) a Ég hef *engan* talað við  
I have nobody talked to  
'I haven't talked to anybody'  
b ?\*Ég hef *ekki neinn* talað við  
I have not anybody talked to  
'I haven't talked to anybody'

- (14) a      Ég talaði *engan* við  
           I talked nobody to  
           'I didn't talk to anybody'
- b      \*Ég talaði *ekki neinn* við  
           I talked not anybody to  
           'I didn't talk to anybody'

It does not seem to be possible to make Christensen's claim fit with the Icelandic facts; I think we have to conclude that *enginn* can stand in various positions where *ekki* and *neinn* cannot possibly be adjacent. Now consider the following sentences:

- (15) Jón hefur [NP fáum]<sub>i</sub> hjálpað \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
       John has few helped  
       'John hasn't helped many people'
- (16) Jón getur [NP lítið]<sub>i</sub> gert \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
       John can little do  
       'John can't do much'
- (17) Jón hefur [NP ýmislegt]<sub>i</sub> þurft að þola \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
       John has various things had to put up with  
       'John has had to put up with various things'

As in the sentences with *enginn*, there is no doubt that the words immediately preceding the VP in these sentences are the objects of the sentences. This can be seen from the case marking of these words, and also from the subcategorization of the verbs in question; they all subcategorize for an object. This shows that we must assume that *fáum*, *lítið* and *ýmislegt* are in fact objects in (15)-(17). Note that the preposed phrases do not have to be negative, as they must be in the other Scandinavian languages, it seems. Let us now try to pin down the exact conditions on this unusual position of the object.

Traditionally, the preposed words in (15)-(17) have either been classified as adjectives or as indefinite pronouns. It seems to be clear that Christensen's explanation for the behaviour of *ingen* cannot be extended to these examples. At least, there would be no historical motivation for doing so. However, it is evident that the preposed words have something in common; i.e., some sort of quantification. It is quite clear that ordinary NPs or demonstrative pronouns, for instance, can not stand in this position:

- (18) \*Jón hefur [NP þessu]<sub>i</sub> logið \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
       John has this lied  
       'John has lied this'
- (19) \*Jón getur [NP þetta]<sub>i</sub> gert \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
       John can this do  
       'John can do this'
- (20) \*Jón hefur [NP erfiðleika]<sub>i</sub> þurft að þola \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
       John has difficulties had to put up with  
       'John has had to put up with some difficulties'

But if a quantifier is added to the object, in (20) for instance, the sentence becomes much better:

- (21) ?Jón hefur [NP ýmsa erfiðleika]<sub>i</sub> þurft að þola \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
John has various difficulties had to put up with  
'John has had to put up with various difficulties'

Thus it appears that the presence of a quantifier-like word is the governing factor here; and we must assume that such movement of quantifiers from the object position to a preverbal position is possible in Modern Icelandic, although the movement of other kinds of objects to a preverbal position has now become obsolete.

Given the fact that OV word order was much more frequent in Old Icelandic than it is today, one could expect that this preposing of quantified objects would have been even more obligatory in Old Icelandic. But this does not seem to be the case, as shown by (22)-(24), taken from the Old Icelandic Sagas:

- (22) ... Dálkur skal taka [NP engar bætur] fyrir sig ...  
... Dálkur shall take no compensation for himself ...  
... 'Dálkur shall not take any compensation for himself'  
(Bjarnar saga Hítðlakappa)

- (23) ... eg hygg hann vera [NP engan vin þinn] ...  
... I believe him to be no friend yours ...  
... 'I believe he is no friend of yours ...'  
(Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar)

- (24) Og er það undur er þú talar við [NP engan mann] nema Urðarkött  
And is it wonder that you talk to no man but Urðarköttur  
'And it is strange that you don't talk to anyone but U.'  
(Finnboga saga ramma)

In these examples, preposing would be much preferred or even obligatory in Modern Icelandic. This shows that the preposing of quantified objects is not a historical residue of the more general preposing in Old Icelandic; it is an independent process which must be related to the specific words in question.

However, it is not easy to pin down the exact conditions on this movement. Thus, both versions are equally normal in (25):

- (25) a Jón hefur [NP ýmislegt]<sub>i</sub> þurft að þola \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
John has various things had to put up with  
'John has had to put up with various things'  
b Jón hefur þurft að þola [NP ýmislegt]  
John has had to put up with various things  
'John has had to put up with various things'

In (26), on the other hand, the b-sentence is more normal:

- (26) a ?Jón hefur [NP ýmsa erfiðleika]<sub>i</sub> þurft að þola \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
John has various difficulties had to put up with  
'John has had to put up with various difficulties'  
b Jón hefur þurft að þola [NP ýmsa erfiðleika]

John has had to put up with various difficulties  
'John has had to put up with various difficulties'

Not all quantifiers can equally well be moved to preverbal position. It is usually obligatory to prepose *enginn*, as mentioned above; but the movement of other quantifiers is more or less optional, and sometimes impossible. Let us take a few examples:

- (27) a \*Jón hefur getað lesið [NP ekkert]  
John has could read nothing  
'John hasn't been able to read anything'  
b Jón hefur [NP ekkert]<sub>i</sub> getað lesið \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
John has nothing could read  
'John hasn't been able to read anything'
- (28) a \*Jón hefur getað lesið [NP lítið]  
John has could read little  
'John hasn't been able to read much'  
b Jón hefur [NP lítið]<sub>i</sub> getað lesið \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
John has little could read  
'John hasn't been able to read much'
- (29) a Jón hefur getað lesið [NP dálítið]  
John has could read a little  
'John has been able to read a little'  
b Jón hefur [NP dálítið] getað lesið  
John has a little could read  
'John has been able to read a little'
- (30) a Jón hefur getað lesið [NP mikið]  
John has could read much  
'John has been able to read much'  
b ??Jón hefur [NP mikið]<sub>i</sub> getað lesið \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
John has much could read  
'John has been able to read much'
- (31) a \*Jón hefur lesið [NP engar bækur]  
John has read no books  
'John hasn't read any books'  
b Jón hefur [NP engar bækur]<sub>i</sub> lesið \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
John has no books read  
'John hasn't read any books'
- (32) a ?Jón hefur lesið [NP fáar bækur]  
John has read few books  
'John hasn't read many books'  
b Jón hefur [NP fáar bækur]<sub>i</sub> lesið \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
John has few books read  
'John hasn't read many books'
- (33) a Jón hefur lesið [NP einhverjar bækur]

- 'John has read some books'
- b    ??Jón hefur [NP einhverjar bækur]<sub>i</sub> lesið \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
 John has some books read  
 'John has read some books'

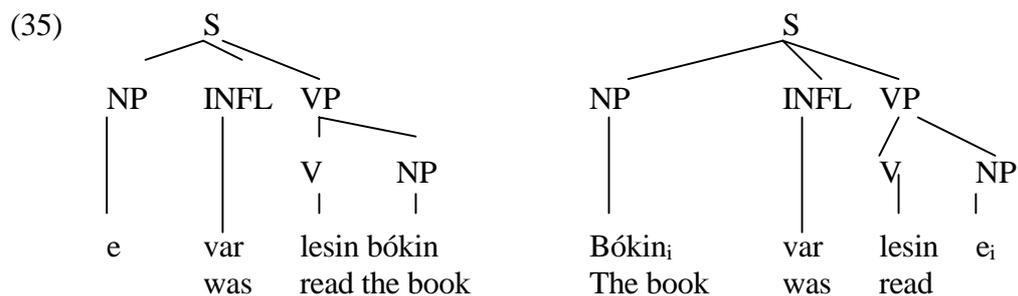
But it is clear that it is not only the words themselves that decide whether preposing is possible; the structure of the sentence is also an important factor. It is for instance often perfectly possible to prepose a quantifier in a question, although it is difficult or even impossible in the corresponding declarative sentence:

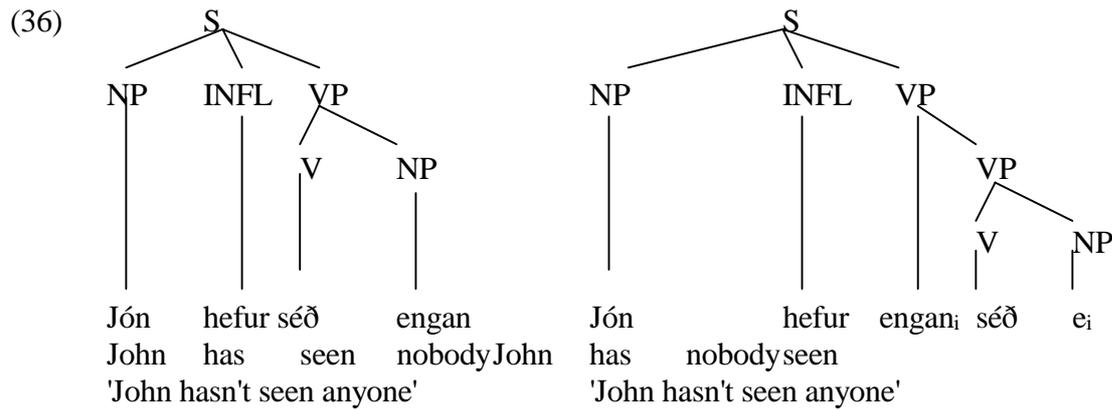
- (34) a    Hefur Jón lesið [NP einhverjar bækur] í ár?  
 'Has John read any books this year?'  
 b    Hefur Jón [NP einhverjar bækur]<sub>i</sub> lesið \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub> í ár?  
 Has John any books read this year  
 'Has John read any books this year?'

Speakers' judgements of these sentences differ very much, so it is not easy to draw any clear conclusions. However, it appears that the more negative quantifiers have a stronger tendency to precede the VP than the more positive ones. It is usually much easier to prepose *enginn* 'nobody', *fáir* 'few', *lítið* 'little', than *allir* 'all', *margin* 'many', *mikið* 'much'. This is of course to be expected, since only the negatives can be preposed in the other Scandinavian languages. But perhaps we can say that we have here two different tendencies; on one hand a tendency to prepose negatives, and on the other hand a tendency to prepose quantifiers.

## 2. The landing sites of preposed quantifiers

Let us now look at the landing sites of the preposed objects. Under most GB-analyses, movement can be of two types; substitution, which means that a phrase is moved into an empty slot of the same type; and Chomsky-adjunction, which means that a node is copied, and the new node immediately dominates the old one and the adjoined element. Substitution is shown in (35), and adjunction in (36):





In his book *Barriers*, Chomsky (1986:6) puts forth the following assumption:

(37) Adjunction is possible only to a maximal projection [...] that is a nonargument

As Chomsky points out, this means that adjunction to VP is allowed (given that VP is a maximal projection in Icelandic), whereas adjunction to NP or INFL is not.

Given these assumptions, we can now look at the possible landing sites of the preposed quantified objects. What happens for instance if there is more than one auxiliary verb will the quantifier precede only its own VP, or the highest VP?

- (38) a Hann mun [NP ekkert]<sub>i</sub> hafa getað gert \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
 He will nothing have could done  
 '(I believe) he wasn't able to do anything'
- b \*Hann mun hafa [NP ekkert]<sub>i</sub> getað gert \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
 He will have nothing could done  
 '(I believe) he wasn't able to do anything'
- c \*Hann mun hafa getað [NP ekkert]<sub>i</sub> gert \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
 He will have could nothing done  
 '(I believe) he wasn't able to do anything'

The movement in (38) appears to be consistent with Chomsky's proposal. We can only have adjunction to the highest VP, which follows from the assumption that it is a maximal projection. Now note that it is always impossible to prepose quantified objects if no auxiliary verb is present:

- (39) a Jón sagði [NP ekkert]  
 John said nothing  
 'John didn't say anything'
- b \*Jón [NP ekkert] sagði \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
 John nothing said  
 'John didn't say anything'
- (40) a Jón lýgur [NP fáu]  
 John lies few  
 'John almost never lies anything'
- b \*Jón [NP fáu] lýgur \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
 John few lies

'John almost never lies anything'

This can easily be explained by the generally accepted theory of Germanic word order referred to in the Introduction; that the finite verb must be moved from VP to INFL, if no auxiliary verb is present. And since INFL is not a maximal projection (assuming that the sentence is a projection of INFL), adjunction to it is impossible; and this rules out the possibilities of getting the b-sentences.

However, this does not necessarily mean that no preposing can take place in sentences without an auxiliary verb; it is possible that it applies string-vacuously, adjoining a quantifier to the VP. In most cases, this would not have any noticeable effect on the surface word order. But in sentences where a quantifier is the object of a preposition, preposing can (and sometimes must) take place, as (41) shows:

- (41) a \*Jón er [PP með [NP engar augabrúnir]]  
John is with no eyebrows  
'John has no eyebrows'
- b Jón er [NP *engar augabrúnir*]<sub>i</sub> [PP með \_\_\_\_]<sub>i</sub>  
Jón is no eyebrows with  
'John has no eyebrows'

This can of course be explained in the same manner as above; by assuming that the verb is moved to INFL, and the quantifier adjoined to the VP. Another possibility would be to assume that the quantifier adjoins to the PP. But (42) appears to make that improbable:

- (42) a \*Jón hefur verið [PP með [NP engar augabrúnir]]  
John has been with no eyebrows  
'John hasn't had any eyebrows'
- b \*Jón hefur verið [NP *engar augabrúnir*]<sub>i</sub> [PP með \_\_\_\_]<sub>i</sub>  
John has been no eyebrows with  
'John hasn't had any eyebrows'
- c Jón hefur [NP *engar augabrúnir*]<sub>i</sub> verið [PP með \_\_\_\_]<sub>i</sub>  
John has no eyebrows been with  
'John hasn't had any eyebrows'

This shows that when it is possible to decide whether the quantifier adjoins to the PP or the VP, the latter option appears to be chosen. However, there are still some unsolved problems here. Consider (43):

- (43) a \*Jón hefur sagt Sveini [NP ekkert]  
John has said Sveinn nothing  
'John hasn't told Sveinn anything'
- b Jón hefur [NP ekkert] sagt Sveini \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
John has nothing said Sveinn  
'John hasn't told Sveinn anything'
- c Jón sagði Sveini [NP ekkert]  
John said Sveinn nothing  
'John didn't tell Sveinn anything'
- d \*Jón sagði [NP ekkert] Sveini \_\_\_\_<sub>i</sub>  
John said nothing Sveinn  
'John didn't tell Sveinn anything'

The question here is this: Why is (43)d not a possible sentence? We would expect that it should be possible to adjoin the quantifier to the VP here, just as in (42) and (43)b, for instance. Is there any difference between (41) and (43) that can explain that (41)b is grammatical, whereas (43)d is not?

In fact there is; at least if we accept the assumption made by Christer Platzack (1983, 1986) and adopted by for instance Thráinsson (1986), that the VP is dissolved when it loses its head, the finite verb, which is moved to INFL. If we assume that the verb movement applies before quantifier preposing, it is understandable that (43)d is impossible; there is no longer a VP for the quantifier to adjoin to. Assuming Chomsky's principle quoted above, there is in fact **no** possibility of any adjoining in (43)d if the VP is dissolved (except for adjoining to the sentence as a whole); the subject and the indirect object NPs are of course in argument position, INFL is not a maximal projection, and that's it. Therefore, the quantifier has no other alternative but to stay in its place. In (41), on the other hand, there is in fact a phrase left for the quantifier to adjoin to; the PP, of which the quantifier is a part. Thus we can get (41)b. If, however, the VP is retained when it loses its head as Holmberg (1986) has argued, why is (43)d not a possible sentence?

Now if we can and must assume that the quantifier adjoins to the PP in (41)b, why can't it do the same in (42)a, where an auxiliary verb is present? As stated above, adjunction to the VP appears to be the only possibility in that sentence. Perhaps we could have some convention stating that a preposed quantifier must always adjoin to the leftmost possible phrase. However, I think it would be more fruitful to try to connect this to the scope of the quantifier. It is usually assumed that quantifier movement must take place in the Logical Form of sentences; the quantifier is adjoined to some phrase or sentence, and by that it takes scope over that phrase or sentence. If the quantifier is buried in the PP, it does not have scope over the VP, and hence must be preposed. But if an auxiliary verb is present, the quantifier still does not have scope over the VP even if it is adjoined to the PP; it will have to adjoin to the VP instead.

### 3. Conclusion

In this paper I have shown that in Modern Icelandic, a typical VO-language, some kinds of genuine OV-sentences are in fact perfectly possible, provided that the objects in question involve "quantification" of some sort. It is obviously not easy to pin down the exact conditions on the fronting of "quantificative" phrases; but it is clear that some semantic distinction sometimes rather subtle is a decisive factor.

It is tempting to try to relate the possible landing-sites of preposed quantifiers to the possible positions of adverbs. It is clear that in most cases, the "favourite" sites of the adverb *ekki* and the NP *enginn*, for instance, are the same. It has been argued, for instance by Platzack (1983, 1986) and Thráinsson (1986), that *ekki* is base-generated in an (optional) adverb slot immediately preceding the VP. Since this is also the favourite position of *enginn* (and some other quantifiers), which is undoubtedly moved there, we might wonder whether it is necessary to assume that *ekki* (and many other adverbs) are base-generated in this position; it might be possible to assume that they are also generated further to the right, and then moved to preverbal position. Cf. Rögnvaldsson (1983) for some discussion of this possibility.

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