

Word Order Changes in the VP in Icelandic

1. An overview of Modern Icelandic word order

- (1) Ég hitti Svein oft á ráðstefnum
I meet Svein often at conferences
'I often meet Svein at conferences'
- (2) a Ég hef oft hitt Svein á ráðstefnum
I have often met Svein at conferences
b ... að ég hef oft hitt Svein á ráðstefnum
that I have often met Svein at conferences
- (3) a Ég mun oft hafa hitt Svein á ráðstefnum
I will often have met Svein at conferences
b... að ég mun oft hafa hitt Svein á ráðstefnum
that I will often have met Svein at conferences
- (4) Fara þeir nú á brott og ofan til Valagilsár
Go they now away and down to Valagils-river
'Then they go away down to the Valagils-river' (*Droplaugarsona saga*, p. 358)
- (5) a Ég vissi ekki að _____ væri farið að rigna hérna
I knew not that _____ was gone to rain here
'I didn't know that it had started raining here'
b Ég vissi ekki að það væri farið að rigna hérna
I knew not that it was gone to rain here
'I didn't know that it had started raining here'
c Ég vissi ekki að *hérna_i* væri farið að rigna *t_i*
I knew not that here was gone to rain
'I didn't know that it had started raining here'
- (6) a Ég auðvitað veit ekkert um málið
I of course know nothing about case-the
'Of course, I don't know anything about this case'
b Jón bara fór
John just left
- (7) a Ef hann ekki kemur strax ...

if he not comes immediately...
'If he doesn't come immediately ...'

b Þegar hann loksins fór ...
when he finally went ...
'When he went at last ...'

(8) Ég veit að þennan mann hefur Jón aldrei séð
I know that this man has John never seen
'I know that John has never seen this man'

(9) Þetta er maður sem skrifað hefur margar bækur
this is a man who written has many books
'This is a man who has written many books'

(10)a Ég gaf einhverjum gömlumkarli þetta
I gave some old guy this

b Ég gaf þetta einhverjum gömlumkarli
I gave this some old guy
'I gave this to some old guy'

(11)a Það hafa komið einhverjir gestir hingað í dag
there have come some guestshere today

b Það hafa komið hingað einhverjir gestir í dag
c Það hafa komið hingað í dag einhverjir gestir

(12)a Ég mun oft hafa lánað Sveini þessa bók
I will often have lent Sveinn (D) this book (A)

- b *Ég mun þessa bók oft hafa lánað Sveini
- c *Ég mun oft þessa bók lánað Sveini hafa
- d *Ég mun oft hafa þessa bók lánað Sveini
- e *Ég mun oft hafa lánað þessa bók Sveini
- f *Ég mun Sveini oft hafa lánað þessa bók
- g *Ég mun oft Sveini hafa lánað þessa bók
- h *Ég mun oft hafa Sveini lánað þessa bók
- i *Ég mun lánað oft hafa Sveini þessa bók
- j *Ég mun oft lánað Sveini hafa þessa bók
- k *Ég mun hafa oft lánað Sveini þessa bók
- l *Ég mun hafa lánað oft Sveini þessa bók

2. Old Icelandic word order

(13) Og er þeir gengið höfðu um hríð ...
And when they walked had on a while
'And when they had walked for a while ...' (Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, p. 988)

(14) Og eg em Jóhannes sem þetta séð og heyrt hefir
And I am John who this seen and heard has
'And I am John, who has both seen and heard this'
(Nýja testamentið [1540], p. 558)

(15)a Þórður hafði ritað bréf til Þorgils ...
Thord had written letter to Thorgils ...
'Thord had written a letter to Thorgils ...' (Þorgils saga skarða, p. 614)

b Þorsteinn hafði látið gera kirkju á bæ sínum
Thorstein had let make church on farm his
'Thorstein had had a church built on his farm'
(Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, p. 1036)

c ... því að Gunnar mun eigi gera mér mein
because Gunnar will not do me harm
'because Gunnar will not do me harm' (Brennu-Njáls saga, p. 188)

d Þá er Sveinn hafði verið konungur þrjá vetur í Noregi ...
when Svein had been king three winters in Norway ...
'When Svein had been the king of Norway for three years ...'
(Ólafs saga helga, p. 553)

e ... hann skal hafa etið mat sinnfyrir miðja nótt ...
he shall have eaten food his before mid night
'... he is supposed to have eaten his food before midnight' (Grágás, p. 34)

(16)a Sá einn mun það gert hafa ...
that one will it done have ...
'There is only one man who could have done this ...'
(Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, p. 987)

b ... og mun maðurinn satt sagt hafa
and will man-the truth said have
'... and will the man have told the truth'
(Ljósvetninga saga (C-version), p. 1680)

c En ekki mun eg þenna mann séð hafa
But not will I this man seen have
'But I believe I have not seen this man'
(Laxdæla saga, p. 1632)

d ... að Hetta tröllkona muni þetta kveðið hafa
that Hetta giantess will this sung have
'... that Hetta the giantess will have sung this'
(Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss, p. 55)

e ... að engi yðar mundi þetta ráð fundið hafa
that noone your wouldthis solution found have
`... that none of you would have found this solution'

(Króka-Refs saga, p. 1529)

(17)a Þorgils hafði gefin verið öxi góð
Thorgils had given been axe good
`Thorgils had been given a good axe'

(Þorgils saga og Haflíða, p. 25)

b Hann kvaðst fundið hafa barn nýfætt
he said found have baby newborn
`He said that he had found a newborn baby'

(Finnboga saga ramma, p. 626)

c Þar muntu séð hafa Þorstein svarta...
there will-youseen have Thorstein black ...
`There I guess you have seen Thorstein the black'

(Laxdæla saga, p. 1632)

d ... því að engi mun séð hafa slík svín...
because noone will seen have such pigs...
`because noone will have seen such pigs'

(Finnboga saga ramma, p. 629)

e ... að fáir muni séð hafa rösklegra mann
that few will seen have braver man
`that few people will have seen a more brave man'

(Íslendinga saga, p. 321)

(18)a Egill sagði að hann hefði drepið þræla Gríms
Egilsaid that he had killed slaves Grim's
`Egil said that he had killed Grim's slaves'

(Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar, p. 517)

b Hallfreðursagði sig það gjarnavilja
Hallfred said REFL it gladlywant
`Hallfred said that he would gladly do it'

(Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds, p. 1244)

c Þorgils sagði sér það vel líka
Thorgils said REFL it well like
`Thorgils said that he liked this well'

(Þorgils saga skarða, p. 584)

d Hann sagðist það gert hafa
he said it done have
`He said that he had done it'

(Eyrbyggja saga, p. 548)

(19)Grímur bað hann það fyrst gera
Grim asked him it first do
`Grim asked that he did this first'

(Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar, p. 416)

- (20) a (V_{fin}) - V_{main} - NP_{DO}
 b (V_{fin}) - NP_{DO} - V_{main}
 c (V_{fin}) - V_{main} - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO}
 d (V_{fin}) - NP_{IO} - V_{main} - NP_{DO}
 e (V_{fin}) - NP_{DO} - V_{main} - NP_{IO}
 f (V_{fin}) - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO} - V_{main}
 g (V_{fin}) - V_{aux/mod} - V_{main} - NP_{DO}
 h (V_{fin}) - V_{main} - V_{aux/mod} - NP_{DO}
 i (V_{fin}) - V_{main} - NP_{DO} - V_{aux/mod}
 j (V_{fin}) - V_{aux/mod} - NP_{DO} - V_{main}
 k (V_{fin}) - NP_{DO} - V_{aux/mod} - V_{main}
 l (V_{fin}) - NP_{DO} - V_{main} - V_{aux/mod}
 m (V_{fin}) - V_{aux/mod} - V_{main} - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO}
 n (V_{fin}) - V_{main} - V_{aux/mod} - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO}
 o (V_{fin}) - V_{aux/mod} - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO} - V_{main}
 p (V_{fin}) - V_{main} - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO} - V_{aux/mod}
 q (V_{fin}) - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO} - V_{aux/mod} - V_{main}
 r (V_{fin}) - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO} - V_{main} - V_{aux/mod}
 s (V_{fin}) - NP_{IO} - V_{aux/mod} - V_{main} - NP_{DO}
 t (V_{fin}) - NP_{IO} - V_{main} - V_{aux/mod} - NP_{DO}
 u (V_{fin}) - NP_{IO} - V_{aux/mod} - NP_{DO} - V_{main}
 v (V_{fin}) - NP_{DO} - V_{aux/mod} - V_{main} - NP_{IO}
 w (V_{fin}) - NP_{DO} - V_{aux/mod} - NP_{IO} - V_{main}
 x (V_{fin}) - V_{main} - prt - NP_{DO}
 y (V_{fin}) - NP_{DO} - prt - V_{main}
 z (V_{fin}) - prt - V_{main} - NP_{DO}

(V_{fin} = finite verb; V_{aux/mod} = auxiliary or modal (non-finite) verb); V_{main} = main (non-finite) verb; NP_{DO} = direct object; NP_{IO} = indirect object)

(21)a Eg mun þiggjahrossin

I will accept horses-the

`I will accept the horses'

(*Víga-Glúms saga*, p. 1927)

b Faðir minn mun því ráða

father my will it decide

`My father will decide that'

(*Víglundar saga*, p. 1976)

c Jarlinn hafði gefið honum skipið

Earl-the had given him ship-the

`The earl had given him the ship'

(*Íslendinga saga*, p. 263)

d ... og muntu henni gefa moturinn ...

and will-youher give cap-the ...

`... and you will give her the cap'

(*Laxdæla saga*, p. 1602)

e ... að hann hefir líf gefið barninu

that he has life given baby-the

`... that he has saved the baby's life'

(*Harðar saga og Hólmverja*, p. 1259)

f ... því að þú hefir mér líf gefið ...
because you have me life given ...
'... because you have allowed me to live'
(*Gísla saga Súrssonar (longer version)*, p. 938)

g ... að sárið mundi hafa grandað honum
that wound-the wouldhave killed him
'... that the wound would have killed him'
(*Bandamanna saga (M-version)*, p. 25)

h ... og mundi hann tekið hafa skipið...
and wouldhe taken have ship-the
'... and he would have taken the ship ...'
(*Gísla saga Súrssonar (longer version)*, p. 932)

i [No examples found]

j Nú munu þær eigi hafa því unað ...
now will they (fem)not have it tolerated ...
'Now they will not have tolerated this ...'
(*Þiðranda þáttur*, p. 2255)

k Tíðindi mundi oss það hafa þótt einastund
news wouldus it have found one time
'There have been times when we would have found this great news'
(*Gísla saga Súrssonar (shorter version)*, p. 865)

l ... og kvaðst enginn maður þetta gera vilja
and said no man this do want
'... and everybody said that they did not want to do this'
(*Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, p. 1407)

m... en Eyjólfurkvaðst hafa gefið Bjarna sauðina
but Eyjolf said have given Bjarnisheep-the
'... but Eyjolf said that he had given Bjarni the sheep'
(*Reykðæla saga*, p. 1769)

n ... en hann mundi fengið hafa henni mikinn áverka
... but he wouldgiven have her great wound'
'... but he would have hurt her badly'
(*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, p. 1006)

o [No examples found]

p [No examples found]

q Bárður kvaðst honum engi mundu segja
Bard said him no wouldsay
'Bard said that he would not tell him any [news]'
(*Króka-Refs saga*, p. 1528)

r ... að þessi maður mundi honum sanna hluti sagt hafa
that this man would him true things said have
`... that this man would have told him the truth'
(*Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*, p. 179)

s Ásbjörn lést honum mundu gefa fé til
Asbjorn said him would give money to
`Asbjorn said that he would give him money for doing it'
(*Hákonar saga herðibreiðs*, p. 808)

t Hallbjörn ... kveðst enn hverjummanniveitt hafa búðarrúm ...
Hallbjorn ... says yet every man given have booth-place ...
`Hallbjorn says that up to now, he has offered every man lodging in his booth'
(*Gísla saga Súrssonar (longer version)*, p. 940)

u ... hví Bolli mun sér hafa þar svo staðar leitað ...
why Bolli will REFL have there so place searched ...
`... why Bolli will have chosen himself such a place to hide'
(*Laxdæla saga*, p. 1613)

v ... og sagðist hann bústað vilja reisa sér
and said he house want build REFL
`... and he said that he wanted to build himself a house'
(*Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða*, p. 1397)

w Hann kveðst fyrir löngu það hafa honum spáð ...
he says for long it have him foretold ...
`He says that he has long ago foretold him this'
(*Finnboga saga ramma*, p. 634)

x Nú hafði einn þeirra Skrælingja tekið upp öxi eina
now had one of-them barbarians taken up axe one
`Now one of the barbarians had picked up an axe'
(*Grænendinga saga*, p. 1106)

y ... mun eg annað ráð upp taka
will I another solution up take
`I have another solution'
(*Gísla saga Súrssonar (longer version)*, p. 936)

z Hvenær skaltu upp takaslíkan ágætisgrip?
when shall-you up takesuch marvellous thing?
`When are you going to wear such a marvellous piece'
(*Laxdæla saga*, p. 1608)

3. Configurationality

(22)S -> (XP) V_[+T] XP*

(23)a Ingólfur segir: Vann hann á Þormóði Bersasyni?
Ingolf says: Won he on Thormod Bersason
'Ingolf says: Did he kill Thormod Bersason?'
Gríma segir: Sjá hinn sami gerði það.
Grima says: That the same did it
'Grima says: He was the one who did it'

(*Fóstbræðra saga*, p. 798)

b Þórir hvarf aftur og gerði það að ráði Þorgils
Thorir went back and did it for advice Thorgils's
'Thorir went back because Thorgils advised him to do so'

(*Þorsteins saga hvíta*, p. 2057)

c Ingólfur... byggði fyrstur landið;
Ingolf ... settled first country-the;
gerðu það aðrir landnámsmenn eftir hans dæmum
did it other settlers after his examples

'Ingolf was the one who first settled the country; other settlers followed his examples'(*Landnámabók*, bl.

(24)*Drepið þenna mann hefi eg nú
killed this man have I now

(25)a Þá var hann beðinn af vinum sínum að staðfestasthér
then was he asked by friends REFL to settle here
'Then he was asked by his friends to settle here'

(*Bandamanna saga (K-version)*, p. 27)

b Því máli var vel svarað af móður hennar
that proposal was well answered by mother her
'This proposal was answered positively by her mother'

(*Gunnars saga Keldugnúpsfjfls*, p. 1157)

c Þá var hann tekinn af óvinum sínum
then was he taken by enemies REFL
'Then he was taken by his enemies'

(*Íslendinga saga*, p. 673)

d Hann var kallaður af mörgum mönnum Eysteinn meyla
he was called by many men Eystein meyla
'He was called Eystein meyla by many people'

(*Magnúss saga Erlingssonar*, p. 844)

e ... þá var þetta kveðið af einhverjum
then was this composed by someone
'Then this was composed by someone'

(*Þorgils saga og Hafliða*, p. 22)

(26) a Ekki er hann sagður mikilmenni
 not is he said great man
 `He is not considered a great man' (*Reykðæla saga*, p. 1743)

b ... jöklar eru mjög miklir sagðir á Grænlandi
 glaciers are very great said on Greenland
 `They say that there are very big glaciers in Greenland'
(*Grænlinga saga*, p. 1098)

c Sá var honum sagður frændi Sörla
 that was him said uncle Sörli's
 `He was told that this one was Sörli's uncle'
(*Íslendinga saga*, p. 256)

4. Basic order in the VP: OV or VO?

(27)a Old Icelandic could have had OV-order in the VP, and extensive movement (of full NPs and non-finite verbs) to the right.

b Old Icelandic could have had VO-order in the VP, and extensive movement (of pronominal objects and non-finite verbs) to the left.

c Old Icelandic could have had either OV- or VO-order in the VP, i.e., the choice could have been free.

(28)... hvort hún vill eigahann
 whether she will own him
 `... whether she wants to marry him'
(*Brennu-Njáls saga*, p. 142)

(29)... eða þættist séð hafa hann fyrr
 or thought seen have him before
 `... or thought that (he) had seen him before'
(*Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*, p. 661)

(30) Grammar A:	Grammar B:
Basic OV	Basic VO
+ VO by transformations	+ OV by transformations
(V-to-I and rightward movement	(leftward movement of
of 'O', e.g. Heavy NP-Shift)	'O')

(31)a Nú hefur það tvígang stytta verið
 now has it twice shortened been
 `Now it has been shortened twice'
(*18th century; from Indriðason 1987*)

c Hafði hann biskup verið 8 vetur og 20
 had he bishop been 8 winters and 20
 `He had been bishop for 28 years'
(*19th century; from Indriðason 1987*)

(32)a Hann ... sagði Ásbirni þau tíðindi sem orðið höfðu
 he told Asbjorn the news that happened had
 `He told Asbjorn what had happened'
(*Finnboga saga ramma*, p. 650)

b sveinninn ... heilsar þeim vel er komnir voru
 boy-the greets them well that come was
 'The boy greets well those who had come' (Hænsna-Þóris saga, p. 1420)

c Sá fór er sendur var ...
 that went that sent was ...
 'The one who was sent went away ...' (Króka-Refs saga, p. 1518)

(33)a Hann skal fundið hafa fé sitt ...
 he shall found have sheep REFL ...
 'He must have found his sheep ...' (Grágás, p. 304)

b ... og hann mundi tekið hafa hross þeirra
 and he wouldtaken have horses their
 '... and he would have taken their horses' (Vatnsdæla saga, p. 1903)

(34)a Sagt hefi eg það er eg mun segja
 said have I it that I will say
 'I have already said my last word on this' (Svarfdæla saga, p. 1812)

b Vita skyldir þú fyrst hvað þú vildir
 know should you first what you want
 'You should first know what you want' (Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu, p. 1172)

(35)i (V_{fin}) - V_{main} - NP_{DO} - V_{aux/mod}
 o (V_{fin}) - V_{aux/mod} - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO} - V_{main}
 p (V_{fin}) - V_{main} - NP_{IO} - NP_{DO} - V_{aux/mod}

5. The loss of OV-order

(36)Ég hef engan séð
 I have noone seen
 'I haven't seen anyone'

(37)Jón hefur ýmislegt gert sér til gamans
 John has various things done himself to fun
 'John has done several things to amuse himself'

(38)*Ég hef hann séð
 I have him seen
 'I have seen him'

(39)??Lesið hef ég þessa bók
 read have I this book
 'I have read this book'

(40)... og það rigndi ekki yfir jörðina í þrjú ár og sex mánaði
... and it rained not over earth-the in three years and six months
'It did not rain on the earth for three years and six months'

(*Nýja testamentið* [1540], p. 500)

6. Conclusion

- (41)a Almost any order of post-Infl constituents appears to occur in Old Icelandic.
- b However, it is clear that the VP exists as a syntactic constituent.
- c Because of the stability of both OV- and VO-orders, it is not convincing to assume abrupt reanalysis of phrase structure.
- d Many of the movement rules we would have to posit to derive sentences with surface OV-order from a VO-base are otherwise unmotivated.
- e The most natural way of accounting for all the possibilities appears to be to accept the Double base hypothesis.
- f By assuming that the OV-VO parameter was unspecified, we can account for a great majority of all Old Icelandic sentences without positing any movement of constituents of the VP.
- g Free word order and many instances of empty categories make it seem a reasonable assumption that children would have had difficulties in setting the OV-VO parameter.
- h When Stylistic Fronting lowered in frequency, the expletive subject *það* was introduced, and pro-drop became ungrammatical, more and more sentences came to have surface VO-order.
- i At some point, presumably around 1800, the VO-order had become so dominant that children could begin to set the parameter to VO.
- j As a result, OV-sentences disappeared from the language in a relatively short time in the first half of the nineteenth century.

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