

Icelandic vs. German: Oblique subjects, agreement and expletives

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1 Introduction

Despite surface similarities, Icelandic and German are taken to differ drastically with respect to the structure of impersonal predicates (1), dative passives (2) and ‘inverse’ predicates (3):

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|-----|--|-----------|
| (1) | a. Mér er kalt. | Icelandic |
| | b. Mir ist kalt. | German |
| | me-DAT is cold | |
| | ‘I’m freezing.’ | |
| (2) | a. Honum var hjálpað. | Icelandic |
| | b. Ihm wurde geholfen. | German |
| | him-DAT was helped | |
| | ‘He was helped.’ | |
| (3) | a. Okkur fellur þetta. | Icelandic |
| | b. Uns gefällt das. | German |
| | us-DAT likes/pleases this-NOM | |
| | ‘We like that.’ or: ‘This pleases us.’ | |

In Icelandic the subject-like oblique has been shown to behave syntactically as a subject with respect to a number of properties, of which control infinitives and conjunction reduction have been taken to be the most important (e.g. Andrews 1976, Thráinsson 1979, Zaenen, Maling and Thráinsson 1985, Sigurðsson 1989, Jónsson 1996, Barðdal 2001). Similar arguments have also been made for subject-like obliques in Faroese (Barnes 1986). Such syntactic behavior, however, has been reported to be lacking in German (e.g. Reis 1982, Zaenen, Maling and Thráinsson 1985, Sigurðsson 1989, 2001a, Fanselow 2002, Wunderlich 2003). This has led to a dichotomization between Icelandic and German, subject-like obliques being analyzed as subjects in Icelandic but as objects in German. In addition, certain differences regarding verb agreement and occurrences with expletives have been taken to support the non-subject analysis of subject-like obliques in German. The non-subject analysis has also been unanimously assumed for subject-like obliques at the earlier stages of the Germanic languages (cf. the references in Barðdal and Eythórsson 2003 and Eythórsson and Barðdal 2003).

Recently, however, this dichotomy between Icelandic and German has been rejected (cf. Barðdal 2002, Eythórsson and Barðdal 2003). Instead, it is argued that the difference between the two languages is gradient and not categorical, and that subject-like obliques behave syntactically as subjects with regard to all the relevant behavioral properties of subjects in Modern German. Furthermore, the same can be shown to have been the case in the older Germanic languages in general. In this paper, we first present data which show that subject-like obliques in German behave as syntactic subjects with regard to reflexivization, conjunction reduction and control infinitives, despite claims to the contrary in the literature. We then discuss two issues which in particular have been claimed to support the non-subject analysis for subject-like obliques in German: verb agreement and expletives. We refute these claims, concluding that there are no arguments for assigning object status to subject-like obliques in German. Rather, all the conclusive evidence points to their subject status, exactly as in Modern Icelandic and Faroese.

2 Oblique subjects

One property generally taken to support a subject analysis of an NP is its ability to bind a reflexive. Subject-like obliques in German display this property (e.g. Seeffranz-Montag 1983, Barðdal 2000, 2002, Haspelmath 2001, Eythórsson and Barðdal 2003):

- (4) a. **Ihm** graut vor **sich selbst**.
 him-DAT shudders for self self
 ‘He frightens himself.’
 (www.epd.de/film/2001/8drogen.htm, 2001)
- b. **Dem kleinen Heinrich** graust es vor **sich selbst**,
 the-DAT small Heinrich shudders it for self self
 ‘Little Henry was horrified by (the idea of) himself,’
 (www.wdr.de/radio/wdr2/rheinweser/19990226.html, 1999)
- c. ... und man ahnt, dass es **ihn** tief drinnen vor **sich selbst** ekelt.
 and one suspects that it him-ACC deeply inside forself self disgusts
 ‘... and one suspects that deep inside he despises himself.’ (www.echo-online.de/kultur/kritik_detail.php3?sshl=2573, 2002)

These examples show that the datives in (4a–b) and the accusative in (4c) control clause-bound reflexivization, in spite of their oblique case marking.

Moreover, when two clauses are conjoined, the subject of the second clause can generally be left unexpressed provided that it has the same reference as the subject of the first clause. In German, as is well known in the literature, a subject-like oblique cannot be left unexpressed on identity with a nominative subject, or vice versa (e.g. Cole et al. 1980, Reis 1982, Zaenen, Maling and Thráinsson 1985, Sigurðsson 1989, 2002a, Fanselow 2002, Wunderlich 2003), while in Icelandic such omission is possible. However, Barðdal (2002) and Eythórsson and Barðdal (2003) argue, following Seeffranz-Montag (1983), that the subject of the second conjunct can in fact be left unexpressed if it carries the same morphological case as the subject of the first conjunct:

- (5) a. **Mich** schauderte und ____ ekelte.
 me-ACC felt-horrified and Ø-ACC felt-disgusted
 ‘I felt horrified and disgusted.’
- b. **Mich** dürstet jetzt sehr, aber ____ hungert gar nicht.
 me-ACC thirsts now very but Ø-ACC hungers at-all not
 ‘I’m very thirsty now, but not at all hungry.’
- c. **Mir** gefällt mein Studium, aber ____ graut schrecklich
 vor der Prüfung.
 me-DAT likes my study but Ø-DAT fears horribly for
 the exam
 ‘I like my studies but I’m terrified at the thought of the
 exam.’

In the second conjunct in (5a–b) a subject-like accusative has been left unexpressed on identity with a subject-like accusative in the first conjunct, and in (5c) a subject-like dative has been left unexpressed on identity with a subject-like dative in the preceding clause. For examples and argumentation showing that the ability to be left unexpressed in second conjuncts is not found with identically case-marked objects, see Barðdal (2002) and Eythórsson and Barðdal (2003).

It is also argued in the current literature that impersonal constructions of the type in (1–3) above are ungrammatical in control infinitives in German (Cole et al. 1980, Reis 1982, Zaenen, Maling and Thráinsson 1985, Sigurðsson 1989, 2002a,

Fanselow 2002, Wunderlich 2003). However, attested examples of control infinitives involving impersonal constructions have been reported by Barðdal (2002) and Eythórsson and Barðdal (2003). Below we present more such examples:

- (6) a. Ein Recht für geistig wie körperlich behinderte Frauen,
____ nur von
a right for mentally as physically disabled women
PRO-DAT only by
Frauen bei intimen Handlungen **assistiert zu werden**,
gibt es in der
women at private activities assisted to be is there in the
Bundesrepublik ... nicht.
Federal-Republic ... not.
'The right for mentally and physically disabled women
to get assistance from women only when engaged in
private activities does not exist in Germany.'
(www.freitag.de/2002/45/02450402.php, 2002)
- b. Vor der Durchsuchung hat man die Möglichkeit, ____
von einer
before the search has one the opportunity PRO-DAT by a
Anwaltsperson **geholfen zu werden**.
lawyer helped to be
'Before the search it is possible to get help from a
lawyer.' (www.noglobal.org/tutelalegalet.htm, 2001)
- c. ... daß wir die Notwendigkeit erkennen, ____ **vergeben**
zu werden und
that we the necessity admit PRO-DAT forgiven to be and
den Mut aufbringen, auch um Vergebung zu bitten.
the courage out-bring also for forgiveness to ask
'... that we admit to the necessity to be forgiven and
have the courage to ask for forgiveness.'
(members.eunet.at/grcath/liebet.html, 1999)

These examples show that impersonal constructions occur in control infinitives with the subject-like oblique being the unexpressed argument, a property generally taken to be confined to subjects (Falk 1995, Moore and Perlmutter 2000, Sigurðsson 2002a).

In sum, subject-like obliques in German have the ability to control reflexivization and omission in second conjuncts and controlled infinitives, exactly like their counterparts in Icelandic. The two latter properties are subject to more restrictions in German than in Icelandic, for reasons which are not well understood (see Barðdal 2002 and Eythórsson and Barðdal 2003 for some speculations). What is clear, however, is that the difference between Icelandic and German is gradient and not categorical.

3 Agreement

Sigurðsson (2002b and earlier work) points out for Dat-Nom verbs in Icelandic that the verb agrees with the nominative object in 3 person plural. On the other hand, no such agreement is found in 1 and 2 persons (Sigurðsson 2002b: 125).

- (7) a. Honum myndu alltaf líka **þeir**.
 him-DAT would-3P-PL always like they-NOM-3P-PL
 ‘He would always like them.’
 b. *Honum mynduð alltaf líka **þið**.
 him-DAT would-2P-PL always like you-NOM-2P-PL
 c. *Honum myndum alltaf líka **við**.
 him-DAT would-1P-PL always like we-NOM-1P-PL

This lack of person agreement is not found with Dat-Nom predicates in German (Sigurðsson 2002b: 127):

- (8) a. Ihm würden **sie** immer gefallen.
 him-DAT would-3P-PL they-NOM-3P-PL always like
 ‘He would always like them.’
 b. Ihm würdet **ihr** immer gefallen.
 him-DAT would-2P-PL you-NOM-2P-PL always like
 ‘He would always like you.’
 c. Ihm würden **wir** immer gefallen.
 him-DAT would-1P-PL we-NOM-1P-PL always like
 ‘He would always like us.’

Sigurðsson concludes that in German the verb agrees with the nominative argument in person and number, but in Icelandic it only agrees in number. This difference between Icelandic and German has been taken to support the analysis that the dative is the syntactic subject in Icelandic whereas in German it is the nominative that is the syntactic subject.

However, this comparison between Icelandic and German is unwarranted. In general terms, although the ‘defective’ agreement in Icelandic may well relate to the object status of the nominative NP in Dat-Nom constructions, the fuller agreement in German cannot be used to support the view that the nominative NP must be a subject, rather than an object, in that language. German may simply be more conservative than Icelandic with respect to nominative object agreement, even if the grammatical relations are the same in the two languages. A more specific problem with the above claim has to do with the fact that there are two categories of Dat-Nom predicates in Icelandic and we believe that the comparison in (7–8) involves the wrong type of Dat-Nom verb. German *(ge)fallen* ‘like, please’ should be compared, not with the Icelandic *líka* ‘like’, but its cognate *falla* (*í geð*) ‘like, be to (sb’s) liking, please’. Earlier research on Dat-Nom predicates in Icelandic (Barðdal 2001) has shown that a subcategory of Dat-Nom predicates can alternate between the Dat-Nom and the Nom-Dat constructions, while another subcategory of Dat-Nom verbs cannot alternate in this way and only the dative can be assigned subject status. One such non-alternating Dat-Nom verb in Icelandic is, in fact, *líka* (Barðdal 2001: 59). This difference between non-alternating and alternating Dat-Nom predicates is illustrated in the following examples with *líka* and *falla í geð*:

- (9) a. **Mér** hefur aldrei líkað **Guðmundur**.
me-DAT has never liked Guðmundur-NOM
‘I have never liked Guðmundur.’
b. ***Guðmundur** hefur aldrei líkað **mér**.
Guðmundur-NOM has never liked me-DAT
- (10) a. **Mér** hefur aldrei fallið **Guðmundur** í geð.
me-DAT has never fallen Guðmundur-NOM in liking
‘I have never liked Guðmundur.’
b. **Guðmundur** hefur aldrei fallið **mér** í geð.
Guðmundur-NOM has never fallen me-DAT in liking
‘Guðmundur has never been to my liking.’

The example in (9b) shows that the dative of *líka* cannot occupy the object position immediately following the main verb, whereas the dative of *falla í geð* in (10b) does. The ungrammaticality of (9b) is expected on a dative-subject analysis, while the grammaticality of both word orders with *falla í geð* in (10) is expected on an alternating analysis. It has

been shown for alternating predicates of this type that either argument behaves syntactically as a subject with respect to the subject properties in Icelandic, and this is always the first argument in the neutral (non-topicalized) word order (Barðdal 2001). Therefore, we take it to be sufficient to present two attested examples from Modern Icelandic of control infinitives containing *falla í geð*, in which either argument is left unexpressed: the dative on identity with an indefinite subject in the matrix clause (11a), and the nominative on identity with an indefinite controller retrievable from the context (11b):

- (11) a. ... að maður þurfi að vera haldinn þræslund til að
 ___ **falla í**
 that one-NOM needs to be held severe-servility for to
 PRO-DAT fall in
 geð slík fásinna.
 liking such craziness-NOM
 ‘... that one has to be equipped with severe servility
 to like such craziness.’
 (lb.icemed.is/web/2001/6?ArticleID=905)

- b. Umræður um þrætuefni geta verið erfðar vegna
 löngunar til að
 discussions about disputes can be difficult because-of
 longing for to
 ___ **falla** félögunum í **geð**...
 PRO-NOM fall-INF friends-the-DAT in liking
 ‘Discussions about disputes can be difficult [among
 teenagers] because of their need to be liked by their
 peers...’
 (www.pjus.is/trigger/HA/Salfr-thydingar1-6.doc)

It has been argued that the speaker’s choice between the Dat-Nom construction and the Nom-Dat construction for alternating predicates depends on discourse factors, in that it is the topicality of the referents that determines which construction is selected (Barðdal 2001). More precisely, the sentence topic in (10a) is the dative NP, but the sentence topic in (10b) is the nominative NP. The difference between the two examples is that (10a) is a proposition about the referent denoted by the dative argument, whereas (10b) is a proposition about the referent denoted by the nominative argument. This difference is manifested grammatically in the assignment of subject status to

the more topical argument, preceding the finite verb, and the assignment of object status to the less topical argument, following the main verb. As for non-alternating Dat-Nom predicates, however, there is no correspondence between the topicality of the arguments and grammatical relations.

The examples in (10) contain a dative pronoun and a nominative full NP, as do all the examples discussed in Barðdal (2001). However, when the nominative is a pronoun in 1 or 2 person, the acceptable word order patterns are different:

- (12) a. **Honum** höfum **við** aldrei fallið í geð.
 him-DAT have-1P-PL we-NOM-1P-PL never fallen in liking
 ‘We have never been to his liking.’
 b. **Við** höfum aldrei fallið **honum** í geð.
 we-NOM-1P-PL have-1P-PL never fallen him-DAT in liking
 ‘We have never been to his liking.’
 c. ***Honum** hefur/höfum aldrei fallið **við** í geð.
 him-DAT has-3P-SG/have-1P-PL never fallen we-NOM-1P-PL in liking

In the example in (12a) the pronominal nominative is located between the two verbs. In (10a), however, the nominative full NP follows the main verb, as indeed it must if it does not occupy the clause-initial position. This distributional difference is a clear indication that the nominative full NP in (10a) is an object, whereas the pronominal nominative in (12a) is a syntactic subject; on the other hand, the dative is the subject in the former sentence while in the latter the dative is a topicalized object. The present analysis is supported by the fact that in (12b) the pronominal nominative occupies clause-initial position, while the dative occupies the object position immediately following the main verb. Observe that the word orders in (12) are the reverse of those in (9), illustrating the opposite syntactic status of the nominative and the dative arguments with the two verbs, respectively. In (9) the dative is the subject of *líka*, but in (12) the pronominal nominative is the subject of *falla í geð*. This analysis predicts that the nominative, if a 1 or 2 person pronoun, cannot occupy the object position immediately following the main verb. This prediction is borne out, as shown in (12c).

These data demonstrate that when the nominative argument of *falla í geð* is a full NP the speaker has a choice between the Dat-

Nom and the Nom-Dat constructions, but when the nominative is a 1 or 2 person pronoun, only the Nom-Dat construction is available. This difference is presumably a consequence of the fact that nominative pronouns in 1 or 2 person are inherently topical, since they refer to speech act participants, the speaker or the addressee, and thus they provide the most natural starting point of the sentence. In other words, it follows from the inherent topicality of 1 and 2 person nominative pronouns that *falla í geð* in Icelandic can only be realized as a Nom-Dat type, and not as a Dat-Nom type, when the nominative fulfills this requirement.

We now return to the comparison between Icelandic and German. Table 1 below summarizes the word order and agreement properties of *líka*, *falla í geð* and *gefallen*.

	<i>líka</i>	<i>falla í geð</i>	<i>gefallen</i>
3p	OK Dat-Aux-V-Nom	OK Dat-Aux-Nom-V	OK Dat-Aux-Nom-V
2p	* Dat-Aux-V-Nom	OK Dat-Aux-Nom-V	OK Dat-Aux-Nom-V
1p	* Dat-Aux-V-Nom	OK Dat-Aux-Nom-V	OK Dat-Aux-Nom-V

Table 1: Word order and verb agreement with 1, 2 and 3 person pronominal nominatives.

Table 1 shows that there is no difference in agreement between Icelandic *falla í geð* and German *gefallen*. It is only by comparing German *gefallen* with the wrong type of Dat-Nom predicate in Icelandic that a difference arises. The alternating predicate *falla í geð* in Icelandic always agrees with the nominative if it is in 1 or 2 person, exactly like *gefallen* in German, contra the non-alternating verb *líka* which never agrees with a 1 or 2 person nominative. Therefore, the difference in agreement between Icelandic and German, observed by Sigurðsson, is in fact internal to Icelandic. The comparison is, furthermore, based on the assumption that the German data in (8) above exemplify the Dat-Nom construction. As we will show below, the sentences in (8) are topicalizations of the Nom-Dat argument structure construction and are thus not comparable to the neutral Dat-Nom word order of *líka*.

We have examined 157 instances of finite *falla í geð* on Icelandic web sites and found that in thirty-seven cases the finite verb agrees with the nominative, and in 118 cases the agreement form of the verb is compatible with either argument.

There are two instances, in our material, of lack of nominative agreement. Both these cases involve a preverbal dative in 3 person and a postverbal nominative in 3 person plural, and no 1 or 2 person argument. Moreover, we have not found a single instance of the Dat-Nom construction involving a nominative as a 1 or 2 person pronoun. Rather, all instances of 1 and 2 person pronouns occur with the Nom-Dat construction, including the following example:

- (13) **Við** föllum víst alls ekki **fólki** í geð ...
 we-NOM fall-1P-PL surely at-all not people-DAT in liking
 ‘It seems that we are not to people’s liking ...’ or: ‘We
 are supposedly not popular among people ...’
 (www.hi.is/~hoski/Haskolasaga.pdf)

In addition, the German examples in (8b-c), which have been contrasted with seemingly equivalent Icelandic examples of *lika* (Sigurðsson 2002b), are only grammatical if the preverbal dative is emphasized, while no such emphasis is needed in (8a).¹ We repeat the relevant examples below with emphasis added:

- (14) a. Ihm würden sie immer gefallen.
 him-DAT would-3P-PL they-NOM-3P-PL always like
 ‘He would always like them.’
 b. **IHM** würdet ihr immer gefallen.
 him-DAT would-2P-PL you-NOM-2P-PL always like
 ‘He would always like you.’
 c. **IHM** würden wir immer gefallen.
 him-DAT would-1P-PL we-NOM-1P-PL always like
 ‘He would always like us.’

Accordingly, if the nominative pronoun is 3 person, both word orders are equally acceptable, but if the nominative pronoun is 1 or 2 person, the preverbal dative must bear stress, as is typical in German of arguments topicalized to clause-initial position. In other words, if the nominative with *gefallen* is a 3 person pronoun, speakers have a choice between the Dat-Nom and the Nom-Dat constructions. If, however, the nominative is a 1 or 2 person pronoun, only the Nom-Dat construction is available.

¹ These facts about the distribution of 1 and 2 person pronouns as against 3 person in Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat constructions in German were brought to our attention by Gunnar Hrafn Hrafnbjargarson.

This person asymmetry is equivalent to the one with *falla í geð* in Icelandic, shown in (12) above. On the basis of these findings, we conclude that *gefallen* in German is an alternating predicate, behaving syntactically in the same manner as *falla í geð* in Icelandic.

Moreover, it is a well-established fact cross-linguistically that if an object is in 1 or 2 person, then the ordinary argument structure construction cannot be instantiated but another construction must be activated in its place. Cennamo (2004: 79–80) cites three such examples: In Pashto, an Iranian language, the O argument occurs in the direct case if it is a noun or a 3 person pronoun, while if it is a 1 or 2 person pronoun it receives oblique case marking (cited from Lazard 1994: 170). In some Amerindian languages a pronominal O argument in 1 or 2 person, co-occurring with a full NP subject or a 3 person pronominal subject, invokes a different voice construction, namely the ‘inverse construction’ (cited from Klaiman 1991: 161–226). In Menó-Mené Sasak, in Indonesia, the passive voice must be used under these circumstances (cited from Musgrave 2000: 49–50). These typological facts of the behavior of 1 and 2 person pronominal O arguments match the behavior of 1 and 2 person pronominal nominatives of *gefallen* in German and *falla í geð* in Icelandic, thus providing additional support for analyzing the nominative as a syntactic object in Dat-Nom constructions in both languages.

In sum, the German examples in (8b–c) above involve the Nom-Dat argument structure construction, in which the dative object has been topicalized (giving the Dat-Nom order). On the other hand, the Icelandic examples in (7b–c) are instances of the neutral word order Dat-Nom argument structure construction. We have examined the claim by Sigurðsson (2002b) that the ungrammaticality of the examples in (7b–c) is due to the fact that the verb *líka* does not agree with the 1 or 2 person pronominal object. We find this claim doubtful, not because of the ‘defective’ agreement, but because the alternating verb *falla í geð* does not allow 1 and 2 person pronominal nominatives as objects either, although it allows nominative full NPs as objects. Moreover, the same kind of person asymmetry is found in German. This is evidenced by the fact that sentences with verbs like *gefallen*, containing nominative 1 or 2 person pronouns, like (8b–c), are only felicitous when accompanied with the intonation contour typical of topicalizations, as shown in (14b–

c). Thus, the agreement contrast between the Dat-Nom verb *lika* in Icelandic and the Nom-Dat alternant of the verb *gefallen* in German, observed by Sigurðsson, is irrelevant to the question of the syntactic status of subject-like obliques; it is based on a comparison of entities which are not directly comparable. No contrast arises if the Nom-Dat alternant of *gefallen* is compared with the Nom-Dat alternant of *falla í geð*. The latter verb agrees with the nominative in both Nom-Dat and Dat-Nom constructions in Icelandic (also observed by Sigurðsson 1990–91, 1996 for Dat-Nom/Nom-Dat alternating passives in Icelandic). Moreover, nominative agreement is found with alternating predicates irrespective of the fact that either the nominative or the dative argument can be left unexpressed in control infinitives. This fact further shows that coding properties such as nominative case and verb agreement do not necessarily coincide with behavioral properties of syntactic subjects.

4 Expletives

Finally, we turn to a comparison of expletives, focusing on German *es* ‘it’ and Icelandic *það* ‘it’. In each language these elements are homophonous with the 3 singular neuter pronoun, respectively. Certain differences in the distribution of expletives exist between the two languages. These differences are almost universally taken to be compatible with the subject analysis of subject-like obliques in Icelandic, but have been argued to provide positive evidence for the non-subject analysis of corresponding NPs in German (Haerberli 2002: 291). This claim has in particular been made on the basis of the following contrasts:

- | | | |
|------|--|-----------|
| (15) | a. Es ist mir kalt. | German |
| | b. * Það er mér kalt. | Icelandic |
| | it-EXPL is me-DAT cold | |
| | ‘I’m cold.’ | |
| (16) | a. Es wurde uns geholfen. | German |
| | it-EXPL was us-DAT helped | |
| | ‘We were helped.’ | |
| | b. * Það var hjálpað okkur . | Icelandic |
| | it-EXPL was helped us-DAT | |

To judge by these examples it appears that in German, but not in Icelandic, an expletive can occur in initial position in clauses containing impersonal constructions. In German, moreover, expletive *es* can invert with the subject-like oblique in

impersonal constructions of the type in (15a), optionally occurring to the right of the finite verb which is in second position, as in (17a). In Icelandic, however, *það* can neither occur in clause-initial position (15b) nor in inverted position (17b):

- (17) a. **Mir** ist (**es**) kalt. German
 b. **Mér** er (***það**) kalt. Icelandic
 me-DAT is it-EXPL cold
 ‘I’m cold.’

Observe also that inversion of the expletive is not allowed in dative passives in either language:

- (18) a. **Mir** wurde (***es**) geholfen. German
 b. **Mér** var (***það**) hjálpað. Icelandic
 me-DAT was it-EXPL helped
 Intended meaning: ‘I was helped.’

An influential line of research within generative grammar holds that not only is the subject-like oblique an object in impersonal constructions in German, but also that impersonal constructions contain a ‘silent’ subject (*pro*) which can alternatively be spelled out as *es* (cf. Safir 1985, Sigurðsson 1989, Grewendorf 1989, Cardinaletti 1990, Haider 1991, Vikner 1995, Schütze 1997, Haeberli 2002). Regardless of the merits of this analysis for German, it should be emphasized that it cannot be extended to Icelandic; in the latter language subject-like obliques show all behavioral properties of subjects, as already mentioned in section 1 above. Thus, at a first glance, the fact that expletives can occur in impersonal constructions in German but not in Icelandic would seem to confirm the conventional wisdom that subject-like obliques in German are not syntactic subjects as they are in Icelandic.

Such a conclusion, however, would be premature. In the literature contrasting the behavior of subject-like obliques in German and Icelandic the focus has primarily been on the above differences in the distribution of expletives. Insufficient attention, however, has been paid to the remaining syntactic differences between the two languages, and on closer inspection, the distribution of expletives with impersonal constructions accords with other language-internal regularities found in these languages. Crucially, in Icelandic expletive *það*

can co-occur with an indefinite subject, irrespective of whether it is in nominative or oblique case.

- Nominative subject
- (19) a. **Það** voru **einhverjir strákar** svangir/lamdir.
 it-EXPL were some boys-NOM hungry/hit
 ‘Some boys were hungry.’/‘Some boys were hit.’
- Dative subject
- b. **Það** var **einhverjum strákum** kalt/hjálpað.
 it-EXPL was some boys-DAT cold/helped
 ‘Some boys were cold.’/‘Some boys were helped.’

In fact, not only can *það* co-occur with subjects of intransitive verbs, but also with transitive verbs (cf. Ottósson 1989, Bobaljik and Jonas 1996):

- Nominative subject
- (20) a. **Það** höfðu **einhverjir strákar** borðað hafragrautinn.
 it-EXPL had some boys-NOM eaten oatmeal-porridge
 -the-ACC
 ‘Some boys had eaten the oatmeal porridge.’
- Dative subject
- b. **Það** hafði **einhverjum strákum** líkað
 it-EXPL had some boys-DAT liked
 hafragrauturinn.
 oatmeal-porridge-the-NOM
 ‘Some boys had liked the oatmeal porridge.’

As these examples show, indefinite subjects can freely co-occur with *það* in Icelandic, irrespective of the subject’s case marking. On the other hand, definite subjects are generally not accepted in expletive constructions (cf. Sigurðsson 1989, Vangsnes 1995, Haeberli 2002):

- Nominative subject
- (21) a. ***Það** hafði **Guðmundur** borðað hafragrautinn.
 it-EXPL had Guðmundur-NOM eaten oatmeal-porridge-
 the-ACC
 Intended meaning: ‘Guðmundur had eaten the oatmeal porridge.’

Dative subject

- b. ***Það** hafði **Guðmundi** líkað hafragrauturinn.
 it-EXPL had Guðmundur-DAT liked oatmeal-porridge-
 the-NOM
 Intended meaning: ‘Guðmundur had liked the oatmeal porridge.’

Thus, expletive constructions are subject to a rather strict Definiteness Effect in Icelandic. In German, however, this kind of Definiteness Effect is not manifested to the same degree. To be sure, examples like the following are not considered acceptable by all speakers (Haeberli 2002: 270):

- (22) (*)**Es** kommt **der Mann** zurück.
 it-EXPL comes the-NOM man back

However, the ‘unacceptability’ of this example does not seem to be due to the definiteness of the subject, since it has been noted that such structures become perfectly acceptable if the definite NP has some ‘more descriptive content’ (Haeberli 2002: 270; cf. Platzack 1983, among others).

- (23) **Es** kommt **der Pfarrer/der Vesicherungsberater** zurück.
 it-EXPL comes the-NOM clergyman/the-NOM insurance-agent back
 ‘The clergyman/insurance agent comes back.’

As discussed by Haeberli (2002), it thus seems that some pragmatic factors rather than definiteness are responsible for the restrictions on the co-occurrence of an expletive and a subject in German. In particular, contrastively stressed definite subjects are fine co-occurring with an expletive:

- (24) **Es** stieß ihn **der Soldat** von der Brücke (...
 it-EXPL pushed him-ACC the-NOM soldier off the bridge
 und nicht der Hauptmann).
 and not the-NOM captain
 ‘The soldier pushed him of the bridge (... and not the captain).’

Moreover, definite NPs can also occur in expletive constructions without stress, usually with a modifying element such as *nur* ‘only’, as in (25a), although such modifying

elements are not always necessary, as shown in (25b) (Haerberli 2002):

- (25) a. **Es** hat nur **der Hans** dieses Buch nicht gelesen.
it-EXPL has only the-NOM Hans this-ACC book not read
'Only Hans has not read this book.'
- b. **Es** hatte **der Mann** das Buch noch nicht
it-EXPL had the-NOM man the-ACC book yet not
ausgelesen, da riss
finished then snatched
es ihm schon ein anderer Gast aus der Hand.
it him already an other guest from the hand
'The man had not yet finished reading the book when
another guest snatched it from his hand.'

It is undisputed that the definite nominative NPs in (25) are subjects. Clearly, therefore, the occurrence of a definite NP with *es* in impersonal constructions is not incompatible with an analysis according to which subject-like obliques are subjects and not objects. Exactly as with dative passives, the examples in (26) below show that *es* can occur in the personal nominative passive construction, even when the nominative is pronominal:

- (26) a. Am Anfang des Jahres forderte das
Bezirksamt die Pläne für
in-the beginning of-the year demanded the
local-authorities the plans for
den Kirchnebau [sic] ein, und **es** wurden
the church-rebuilding-PTCL and it-EXPL were
sie diesem auch vorgelegt.
they-NOM this-DAT also presented
'At the beginning of the year the local authorities
demanded the plans for the reconstruction of the
church, and these were presented to them accordingly.'
(home.t-online.de/home/RWrobel/chronik5.htm)
- b. **Es** wurden **wir** alle noch nach Hause geliefert.
it-EXPL were we-NOM all still to home delivered
'We were all brought home.'
(home.t-online.de/home/Melle_Teich/archiv/nov01.htm)

Nominative pronouns can also co-occur with an expletive in other types of *es*-constructions, albeit much less commonly, presumably because they are pragmatically marked:

- (27) **Es** kommt **er** fast gar nicht mehr.
 it-EXPL comes he-NOM almost at-all not more
 ‘He has almost stopped showing up at all.’
 (springfield-shopper.de/php/epiguide/epiguide.php?show=7G05)

In conclusion, we have shown that the distribution of expletives in impersonal constructions does not provide positive evidence for the assumption that subject-like obliques in German are to be analyzed differently from their counterparts in Icelandic. In both languages nominative subjects and subject-like obliques can co-occur with an expletive. Icelandic, however, exhibits a Definiteness Effect not found in German to the same degree. The expletive seems to be the same kind of element in both languages, although the conditions on its occurrence in main clauses are somewhat stricter in Icelandic than in German. In particular, Icelandic only allows an expletive in clause-initial position, whereas in German it can invert in certain sentence types, following the finite verb in second position. The important thing to keep in mind, however, is that in Icelandic the expletive is not to be analyzed as a lexicalized null subject. From the above considerations, it emerges that, contrary to a widely held opinion, such an analysis is unmotivated for German as well.

5 Summary

In this paper we have presented and discussed naturally-occurring data which show that the subject-like oblique of impersonal constructions in German behaves syntactically as a subject with regard to a number of subject properties, such as having the ability to control reflexivization and omission in second conjuncts and controlled infinitives. We have also shown that facts relating to agreement and expletives do not support the non-subject analysis for subject-like obliques in German, contrary to claims to this effect in the current literature. We conclude that subject-like obliques in German are syntactic subjects exactly like their Icelandic and Faroese counterparts, providing additional evidence for the hypothesis that oblique subjects are in fact a Germanic inheritance.

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