

Covert nominative and dative subjects in Faroese*

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Abstract:

This paper presents the results of a recent survey of dative subjects in Faroese, using a judgment task and data elicited from interviews with native speakers. The results indicate that dative subjects are in the process of being replaced by nominative subjects. Moreover, dative subjects behave like nominative subjects in that they may trigger number agreement with the finite verb. It is hypothesized that dative subjects in Faroese have an unrealized nominative case assigned by T(ense) and this makes number agreement possible. This hypothesis is argued to account for certain differences between Faroese and Icelandic, most notably the fact that verbs with dative subjects take accusative objects in Faroese but nominative objects in Icelandic.

1. Introduction

As first shown by Barnes (1986), Faroese has non-nominative (oblique) subjects just like Icelandic, its closest relative among the Scandinavian languages. Still, there is an important difference in that Icelandic has preserved oblique subjects quite well throughout its history whereas oblique subjects have to a great extent disappeared in Faroese. In current-day Faroese, accusative subjects are virtually out-dated and dative subjects are only selected by a handful of experiencer verbs (see Jónsson and Eythórssón 2005). Moreover, the verbs that take dative subjects show variation between the original dative and an innovative nominative case, as illustrated in (1).¹

(1) a. **Mær** dámar føroyskan tónleik
I.DAT like.3S Faroese.ACC music.ACC
'I like Faroese music.'

b. **Eg** dámi føroyskan tónleik
I.NOM like.1S Faroese.ACC music.ACC

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¹ The following abbreviations are used in this paper: 1 = first person, 3 = third person, ACC = accusative case, DAT = dative case, M = masculine, NOM = nominative case, PL = plural and S = singular.

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The example in (1) shows the verb *dáma* ‘like’, the most common verb alternating between dative and nominative subject in Faroese. Other verbs in this tiny class include *leingjast* ‘long for’, *mangla* ‘lack’, *nýtast* ‘need’ and *tørva* ‘need’. The variation between dative and nominative is not associated with any semantic differences that I am aware of but there is a stylistic difference in that the nominative is less formal than the dative. As a result, native speakers are more likely to use nominative with a particular verb, the more informal it is, and this can be seen e.g. in the contrast between *mangla* and *dáma* (see 2.2.1 below).

In this paper, I will report on the results of a recent survey of dative subjects in Faroese, a survey consisting of a judgment task with 30 sentence pairs and an interview where naturalistic data were elicited. In total, 41 speakers participated in the judgment task and 31 speakers were interviewed. The results of the survey indicate that the variation between dative and nominative subjects in Faroese signals change in progress rather than stable variation. Dative subjects are losing ground in Faroese and this manifests itself in at least three ways. First, there is a general preference for nominative over dative in subject position, at least in third person plural. Second, dative subjects may trigger number agreement with the finite verb, thereby behaving as if they were nominative subjects. Third, it is possible for dative experiencers (of at least some verbs) to stay in object position, i.e. not move from their base-generated position inside VP to the subject position.

The paper is organized as follows: In section 2, the main results from the judgment task are laid out. These results are compared to the data collected in the interviews with the informants in section 3. Section 4 presents an analysis, according to which dative subjects in Faroese have covert nominative case and this enables them to control number agreement. The covert nominative is required because finite T in Faroese must assign nominative case on a DP in [Spec,T], the subject position. This requirement on T is absent in Icelandic and hence there is no covert nominative case associated with dative subjects. As a result, nominative case can be assigned to an object in the presence of a dative subject in Icelandic but not in Faroese. The paper ends with concluding remarks in section 5.

2. The judgment task

2.1. Basic information

The judgment task reported here had 41 participants, 20 men and 21 women, in 6 localities across the Faroe Islands: Tórshavn (Streymoy), Fuglafjørður (Eysturoy), Klaksvík (Borðoy), Tvøroyri (Suðuroy), Sandur (Sandoy) and Miðvágur (Vágar). The participants divided into age groups as illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1	Age groups							
	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	Total
Tórshavn	3	1		1	2	1		8
Fuglafjørður	2	1		1	1	1	1	7
Klakksvík	2	1		2	1			6
Tvøroyri		2		2	1		1	6
Sandur	2	1		1	2			6
Miðvágur		4	1	1	1		1	8
Total	9	10	1	8	8	2	3	(41)

As Table 1 shows, the age groups 15-19, 20-29, 40-49 and 50-59 were well represented with 8-10 speakers whereas the other age groups had only 1-3 informants. The number of participants was more evenly distributed across the localities, ranging from 6-8. Thus, the participants in the survey seem to be reasonably representative of the whole population of the Faroe Islands but their number is too low to allow for a meaningful comparison between different age groups or localities.

The judgment task was based on 30 sentence pairs which the informants were presented with on a piece of paper and asked to read aloud and evaluate. This method made it possible for the investigator to correct the informants if they misread the sentences and this happened quite often. The participants were not given detailed instructions on how to evaluate the test sentences but in most cases it was fairly easy to classify the answers as acceptable, dubious or unacceptable. When the informants hesitated in their judgments, the investigator would simply give them specific options to choose from. In some cases, the informants reported that a sentence would be fine in formal registers but not in the every-day speech. All such judgments were marked as dubious, but it is likely that such distinctions were greatly underreported in the survey.

Most of the sentence pairs in the survey had two sentences that differed only with respect to the phenomena under investigation. Of the 30 pairs used in the survey, 17 were designed to check the status of dative case in Modern Faroese. The other 13 pairs involved a variety of syntactic phenomena, e.g. the use of expletive *það*, Stylistic Fronting, exclamatives and verb raising in embedded clauses. In what follows, I will focus on the results for dative subjects in Faroese.

Using sentence pairs in a judgment task has the advantage of making the two variants directly comparable. For instance, an informant evaluating (2a) and (2b) below can only judge these examples differently on the basis

of the object case.² In this way, the relevant syntactic phenomena, which is object case in (2a,b), is isolated and factors independent of that do not get a chance to interfere with the native speakers' judgments.

(2) a. Menningin útihýsir ikki **fortíðina**
progress.the *excludes* *not* *past.the.ACC*
 'Progress does not exclude the past.'

b. Menningin útihýsir ikki **fortíðini**
progress.the *excludes* *not* *past.the.DAT*

A potential problem in using sentence pairs like (2) is that the informants may feel that they have to evaluate the two variants differently even if there is no contrast according to their own intuitions. Therefore, a particular test sentence may get a lower acceptability rate than it would if it was judged on its own. As discussed in 2.2. below, there seems to have been a bias for common variants at the expense of less common variants in the judgment task but no bias in favor of prescriptive norms.

2.2. Main results of the judgment task

The main point of the judgment task was to examine the status of dative subjects in contemporary Faroese by testing (a) the use of nominative for a dative subject, and (b) the option of leaving dative experiencers in object position. The precarious status of dative subjects is also shown by the number of verbs that used to take a dative subject and have become obsolete in colloquial Faroese, e.g. many of the verbs listed by Thráinsson et al. (2004:255-257), but this was not tested in the survey.³

This section presents the main results of the judgment task and it is divided into four subsections. The status of dative subjects with *dáma* 'like' and *mangla* 'lack' is discussed in 2.2.1, showing that dative is the dispreferred option in the three sentence pairs tested. Subsection 2.2.2 focusses on passives of two-place verbs with dative objects, which in most cases show a very strong preference for nominative subjects. A possible account of the weaker status of dative subjects in passives, as opposed to actives, is offered in 2.2.3. Finally, it is shown in 2.2.4 that absence of DP-

² The examples from the judgment task are shown here (and elsewhere) in the same order as they were presented to the informants.

³ As discussed by Pinker (1999), many irregular (strong) verbs in English have become obsolete since they were familiar enough not to be regularized and still not common enough to be learnable as strong verbs. This situation creates uncertainty among native speakers so that they simply stop using the verbs in question. It is easy to imagine a similar scenario as an explanation why many verbs with dative subjects in Faroese have fallen out of usage.

movement to subject position for the dative arguments of *eydnast* ‘succeed’ and *dáma* ‘like’ is widely accepted.

2.2.1. The verbs *dáma* and *mangla*

There were three sentence pairs in the judgment task involving the verbs *dáma* ‘like’ and *mangla* ‘lack’. The informants were presented with three examples of the first verb, shown in (3) below, one with a nominative subject and two with a dative subject. The first dative example was without agreement but the second example featured number agreement with the dative subject. The numbers in brackets show the percentage of informants that accepted each example.⁴

- (3) a. **Nógvar** **kvinnur** Dáma mannfólk við eitt sindur
many.NOM women.NOM like.3PL men.ACC with a bit
 av Búki
of belly (92,7%)
 ‘Many women fancy slightly fat men.’
- b. **Nógvum** **kvinnum** dámar mannfólk við eitt sindur
many.DAT women.DAT like.3S men.ACC with a bit
 av Búki
of belly (24,4%)
- c. **Nógvum** **kvinnum** dáma mannfólk við eitt sindur
many.DAT women.DAT like.3PL men.ACC with a bit
 av Búki
of belly (48,8%)

The numbers here show a very clear preference for nominative over dative and for number agreement over non-agreement if the subject is dative. This is an interesting result in that the prescriptively favored (3b) received the lowest acceptability rate. In fact, everyone accepted either (3a) or (3c) but only three speakers accepted all the three sentences. Presumably, the acceptance rate for (3b) reflects the fact that dative plural subjects not controlling number agreement are mostly confined to formal registers; the unfavorable comparison to (3a) may also have decreased the acceptability rate for (3b).

⁴ As Höskuldur Thráinsson (p.c.) has pointed out to me, there is a potential problem in (3a) in that *mannfólk* could be analyzed as a nominative plural subject and *nógvar kvinnur* as a topicalized accusative object. However, the presence of a dative argument in (3b,c) makes it unlikely that *mannfólk* is analyzed as a subject in those examples.

The verb *mangla* ‘lack’ was tested twice in the judgment task. One pair of sentences had a third person singular subject in a finite clause.⁵

- (4) a. **Flakavinnan** á landi manglar nógv fólk
fishing.work.the.NOM in land need.3S many.ACC people.ACC
 ‘The fishing industry on shore needs many people.’ (85,0%)
- b. **Flakavinnuni** á landi manglar Nógv fólk
fishing.work.the.DAT in land need.3S many.ACC people.ACC
 (46,3%)

As with *dáma*, nominative with *mangla* was accepted by a great majority of the informants and much more so than the dative. Almost a third of the informants liked both (4a) and (4b). Still, there is a clear difference between *dáma* and *mangla* with respect to first person singular subjects. As Thráinsson et al. (2004:229) point out, *mangla* usually takes a nominative subject, also in first person singular. By contrast, dative is strongly preferred to nominative in the first person singular of *dáma* (see 3.1 below). A possible reason for this difference is that *mangla* is a highly colloquial verb borrowed from Danish whereas *dáma* is possible both in formal and informal registers.

The other sentence pair with *mangla* had an infinitival clause with an overt subject, selected by *halda* ‘believe’ in the matrix clause. In such infinitivals, a structurally case-marked subject bears accusative case, as in (5a), and thus corresponds to a nominative subject of finite clauses.

- (5) a. Eg haldi **meg** Mangla hug til avbjóðingarnar
I believe me.ACC lack courage to challenges.the
 fyri Framman
for Ahead
 ‘I think I need courage for the challenges ahead.’ (63,4%)
- b. Eg haldi **mær** mangla hug til avbjóðingarnar
I believe me.DAT lack courage to challenges.the
 fyri Framman
for ahead (41,5%)

These examples were intended to test if dative subjects are dropping out of usage faster in non-finite clauses than finite clauses. Since non-finite clauses of the kind illustrated in (5) are rarely used this was a reasonable question to ask, but the numbers above suggest that the answer is no.

⁵ The percentages shown for (4a) were based on the answers of 40 speakers.

2.2.2. Passives

It is well-known that passivization of verbs taking dative objects yields examples with dative subjects in Icelandic. In other words, the dative case of the active is “preserved” in the corresponding passive as shown in (6):

- (6) a. *Einhver hjálpaði krökkunum* (Icelandic)
someone.NOM helped kids.the.DAT
- b. **Krökkunum** var hjálpað
kids.the.DAT was.3S helped
- c.* **Krakkarnir** voru hjálpaðir
kids.the.NOM were.3S helped.M.S.NOM

In contrast to Icelandic, dative is usually not preserved in Faroese passives of monotransitive verbs (see relevant examples in Thráinsson et al. 2004:266-274).⁶ It seems fair to assume that the loss of case preservation in Faroese passives is part of the general loss of dative subjects in Faroese. There is a difference, though, in that dative loss is more advanced in passives than actives but see 2.2.3 below for a possible account of this fact.

In the judgment task, case preservation with DP-movement in Faroese passives was tested with three verbs taking dative objects: *steðga* ‘stop’, *leiðbeina* ‘instruct’ and *eggja* ‘encourage’. The last verb was chosen from a small set of verbs that still display dative case in Faroese passives.

- (7) a. **Bilurin** varð steðgaður í rundkoyringini í Søldarfirði
car.the.NOM was stopped in roundabout.the in Søldarfj.
 ‘The car was stopped in the roundabout in Søldarfjørður.’ (100%)
- b. **Bilinum** varð steðgað í rundkoyringini í Søldarfirði
car.the.DAT was stopped in roundabout.the in Søldarfj.
 ‘The car was stopped in the roundabout in Søldarfjørður.’ (0%)
- (8) a. **Hvørjum næmingi** í skúlanum kann verða leiðbeint
every.DAT student.DAT in school.the can be instructed
 ‘Every student in the school can receive instruction.’ (19,5%)
- b. **Hvør næmingur** í skúlanum kann verða leiðbeindur
every.NOM student.NOM in school.the can be instructed
 ‘Every student in the school can receive instruction.’ (90,2%)

⁶ When ditransitive verbs are passivized in Faroese it is usually the direct object that undergoes DP-movement to subject position (see Thráinsson et al. 2004:269-274). Hence, the dative indirect object stays in situ in such passives.

(9) a. **Honum** varð eggjað at fara á hesa ferð (36,6%)
he.DAT was encouraged to go on this trip
 ‘He was encouraged to take this trip.’

b. **Hann** varð eggjaður at fara á hesa ferð (78,0%)
he.NOM was encouraged to go on this trip

Nominative scores much higher than dative in all these examples but the strength of the contrast varies with the verb; it is sharpest with *steðga* but weakest with *eggja*. The verb *leiðbeina* is in between but this verb was also tested in the active for comparison. As shown in (10), more informants accepted an accusative object than a dative object:

(10) a. Vónandi kann onkur leiðbeina **mær** (46,3%)
hopefully can someone instruct me.DAT
 ‘Hopefully, someone can instruct me.’

b. Vónandi kann onkur leiðbeina **meg** (65,9%)
hopefully can someone instruct me.ACC

This shows that part of the reason why the dative passive of *leiðbeina* in (8a) got such a low acceptance rate is that many speakers simply do not use dative with this verb. However, this cannot serve as a general explanation of dative loss in Faroese passives. This can be seen with the verb *hjálpa* ‘help’ which only forms a passive with a nominative subject (Thráinsson et al. 2004:268) even though a dative object is strongly favored over an accusative object in the active.⁷ This latter point was firmly established in the judgment task where only one speaker accepted (11a) below but 40 speakers accepted (11b).⁸

(11) a. Hon fekk sjúku, sum læknarnir ikki fingur hjálpt
she got disease which doctors.the not could helped
hana við
her.ACC with
 ‘She got a disease which the doctors could not treat.’

⁷ Actually, the passive of *hjálpa* preserves dative case if the DP stays in object position, cf. examples like (12a) below.

⁸ As discussed by Jónsson (2009b), *hjálpa* belongs to the semantic class of two-place verbs in Faroese that best retains dative case, i.e. verbs of interaction.

- b. Hon fekk sjúku, sum læknarnir ikki fingi hjálpt
she got disease which doctors.the not could helped
henni við
her.DAT with
 ‘She got a disease which the doctors could not treat.’

In addition to the examples presented above, the informants were asked to evaluate a sentence pair where the dative selected by the passive of *ráða* ‘advise’ is preserved in object position vs. subject position:

- (12) a. Tað varð rátt **honum** frá at fara við bátinum
there was advised him.DAT from to go on boat.the
 ‘He was advised not to go on the boat.’ (78,0%)
- b. **Honum** varð rátt frá at fara við bátinum (58,5%)
him.DAT was advised from to go on boat.the
 ‘He was advised not to go on the boat.’

The example in (12a) illustrates what is known as “the new passive” or “the new impersonal” in Icelandic, a construction where a definite or an accusative complement of a passive verb does not undergo DP-movement and behaves like an object (see Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002, Eythórsson 2008 and Jónsson 2009a). It appears that dative passives without DP-movement are possible in spoken language with some verbs whereas dative passives with DP-movement belong to formal registers. It is not surprising therefore that (12a) was accepted by more speakers than (12b).

It is striking that the acceptance rate for (12a) is much higher than for new passives among adult speakers of Icelandic, which is below 10% (see Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002). Another difference between the two languages is that Faroese has new passives only with dative DPs, whereas Icelandic also allows new passives with accusative DPs. This latter fact suggests that new passives in Faroese relate to the loss of dative subjects and may be comparable to active clauses where dative experiencers stay in object position (see further in 2.2.3 below).

There were no examples in the judgment task of plural agreement triggered by dative subjects in passives. It seems that examples of this kind, as in (13) below, are less acceptable than examples of dative agreement in active clauses, like (3c).⁹

⁹ I am indebted to Viktoria Absalonsen, Petra Eliassen, Hjalmar Petersen, Rakul Napóleonsdóttir, Hallgerð Næs Simonsen, Per Jakobsen and Sóley H. Hammer for judgments on Faroese examples in this paper.

- (13) ? Teimum verða eggjað at koyra saman
they.DAT will.be.3PL encouraged to drive together

There are various morphosyntactic differences between examples like (3c) and (13) that might explain the observed contrast in acceptability but there is also a stylistic difference in that dative passives with DP-movement are quite formal in Faroese. Thus, native speakers may object to examples like (13) because number agreement with a dative subject is incompatible with a formal register.

2.2.3. Actives vs. passives

The results reviewed in the preceding sections clearly raise the question why dative subjects are more widely accepted in actives than passives. In other words, why is dative loss further progressed in passives? As discussed below, I believe the answer lies in the role of language acquisition in language change.

Since there is no data available on the acquisition of dative case and passives in Faroese, we will have to rely on studies on child language in Icelandic. These studies indicate that Icelandic children acquire dative subjects of active verbs well before they acquire passives. Sigurðardóttir (2002) shows that children as young as three years old use dative subjects in Icelandic, although using nominative for dative is more common at this early age. As for passives, Benediktsdóttir (2008) claims that children do not use traditional passives productively until they are six or seven years old. The acquisition of Icelandic passives is further complicated by the fact that children have to learn specifically that dative case is preserved in passives. This is shown by the fact that Icelandic children sometimes produce passives with a nominative subject even if the verb in question takes a dative object in the active (Benediktsdóttir 2008).

Assuming that these acquisition facts hold throughout the history of Faroese, it follows that children are much more likely to fail to acquire dative subjects of passives than actives. Failure to acquire dative subjects of passives means that children use instead the regular case for subjects in Faroese, i.e. nominative case. The result is that dative subjects of passives are more likely to be replaced by nominative subjects than dative subjects of active verbs like *dáma* or *mangla*.

2.2.4. Dative experiencers as objects

Two sentence pairs in the judgment task were designed to test the possibility of dative experiencers staying in object position instead of moving by DP-movement to subject position. One pair featured the verb *eydnast* ‘succeed’, with and without the expletive element *tað*. In (14a), the dative argument is an object since *tað* is in subject position but the dative is

a subject in (14b). As shown by the numbers, the first option turned out to be the preferred one although most speakers accepted both possibilities.

- (14) a. Eydnaðist tað **honum** at fáa bóltin í netið? (85,4%)
succeeded it he.DAT to get ball.the in net.the
 ‘Did he succeed in getting the ball into the net?’
- b. Eydnaðist **honum** at fáa bóltin í netið? (68,3%)
succeeded he.DAT to get ball.the in net.the

Crucially, this kind of variation is only found with dative arguments. For instance, the nominative argument of the verb *klára* ‘manage’ can only be a subject as shown in (15) below:

- (15) a. Kláraði **hann** at lesa bókina
managed he.NOM to read book.the
 ‘Did he manage to read the book?’
- b. * Kláraði tað **hann** at lesa bókina
managed it he.NOM to read book.the

With verbs that are comparable to *eydnast* in Faroese, Icelandic only allows the dative argument to be the subject (cf. the verb *takast* ‘succeed’). In view of this fact and the general loss of dative subjects in Faroese, it is likely that a dative object with *eydnast* is an innovation. The same reasoning applies to *dáma* (discussed below) as verbs comparable to *dáma* in Icelandic, e.g. the verb *líka* ‘like’, require the dative argument to be a subject.

The other sentence pair involved the verb *dáma*, shown in (16) below.¹⁰ The numbers for (16a) indicate that most speakers allow the dative experiencer to stay in its base-generated position inside VP, although moving the dative experiencer to subject position, as in (16b), is more widely accepted.

- (16) a. Tað hevði ikki dámað **mær** (63,4%)
that.ACC had not liked I.DAT
 ‘I would not have liked it.’
- b. Tað hevði **mær** ikki dámað (78,0%)
that.ACC had I.DAT not liked
 ‘I would not have liked it.’

¹⁰ Some of the informants reported a preference for *dámt* as the past participle of *dáma* and they were asked to evaluate these examples as if they had that form.

This variation is only possible with a dative experiencer. If the experiencer argument of *dáma* is nominative, it must move to subject position, as shown by the contrast between (17a) and (17b):

- (17) a. Tað hevði **hon** ikki dámað
that.ACC had she.NOM not liked
 ‘She would not have liked that.’
- b. * Tað hevði ikki dámað **hon**
that.ACC had not liked she.NOM
 ‘She would not have liked that.’

The example in (16a) does not show whether the accusative argument of *dáma* is in subject or topic position when the dative argument is an object. Presumably, the accusative argument must be a topic as native speakers reject examples like (18) where the accusative is in an unambiguous subject position.

- (18) * Higartil hevur hana dámt **mær** ógvuliga væl
so.far has her.ACC liked I.DAT extremely well
 ‘So far, I have liked here extremely well.’

This suggests that there is no reassignment of grammatical functions with *dáma*; rather the dative argument has the option of not moving to subject position, in which case there is no visible element in subject position.

3. The interviews

3.1. Background

Prior to the judgment task discussed in section 2, most of the informants were interviewed by the investigator to elicit naturalistic data. In total, there were 31 interviews in five localities: Tórshavn (7), Fuglafjørður (6), Klaksvík (6), Suðuroy (6) and Sandur (6). I was unable to conduct interviews in Miðvágur on the last day of the field work but the written survey there was administered by Rakul Napóleonsdóttir and Petra Eliassen.

The interviews varied in length between 2:13 and 9:25 minutes, the average interview being slightly over 5 minutes. The main topic of the interviews was Faroese food but some interviews also touched on music, leisure time or neologisms in Faroese. These topics were chosen to elicit examples of the verb *dáma* ‘like’, the most common verb with a dative subject in Faroese. This turned out very well since nearly all the speakers used this verb as they were discussing what they like or dislike e.g. in food or music. The interviews produced a total of 211 tokens of the verb *dáma*, approximately 7 per speaker on average. A great majority of these

examples, or 147 to be precise, had a first person singular subject but there were 53 examples of a third person plural subject. These examples were elicited by asking the participants what they thought about the likes and dislikes of other people, e.g. young people in the Faroe Islands.¹¹

The interview data seem to be fairly typical of colloquial Faroese. The speakers were generally relaxed and there was no evidence of accommodation. For instance, the speakers did not simplify their speech or reduce their normal speech rate even if they could hear quite clearly that the interviewer did not have native speaker competence in Faroese.

As discussed in more detail below, the number and person of the subject is an important factor in the use of dative subjects in Faroese. I am not aware of any other syntactic properties that are relevant for the choice of subject case with verbs like *dáma* ‘like’. The interview data suggest e.g. that it does not matter whether the subject precedes or follows the finite verb. In first person singular, there were 26 examples of a dative subject following the finite verb and 8 examples of a nominative subject after the finite verb. This reflects the basic 3:1 ratio between dative and nominative that is found for all examples of first person singular subjects (see further in 3.2 below).

3.2. First person singular

The interview data indicate that dative is about three times more common than nominative with *dáma* if the subject is first person singular. Thus, there were 111 examples of a dative subject (from 27 speakers) but 36 examples of a nominative subject (from 8 speakers). Some of the examples with *dáma* and a first person singular subject from the interviews are shown in (19) and (20) below:¹²

- (19) a. **Mær** dámar væl sterkan mat (girl, 15)
 I.DAT *like.3S* *well* *spicy.ACC* *food.ACC*
- b. **Mær** dámar væl at ganga út Í natúrini (man, 42)
 I.DAT like.3S *well* *to* *walk* *out* *in* *nature.the*
- c. Tað dámar **mær** øgiliga Væl (man, 58)
 that.ACC *like.3S* *I.DAT* *really* *well*

¹¹ It is worth pointing out that *dáma* was the only verb with a dative subject that the native speakers used in the interviews and there were no examples of passives of verbs taking dative objects.

¹² There is no overt subject in (20c) but the verbal morphology shows that the null subject there is nominative and first person singular.

- (20) a. **Eg** *dámi* *eisini* *útlenskan* *mat* (woman, 70)
I.NOM *like.1S* *also* *foreign.ACC* *food.ACC*
- b. **Eg** *dámi* *tað* (boy, 16)
I.NOM *like.1S* *that.ACC*
- c. *Dámi* *best* *krydraðan* *mat* (girl, 20)
like.1S *best* *spicy.ACC* *food.ACC*

Although the data gathered in the interviews do not give a clear picture of individual speakers, there are indications that different speakers use a dative subject with *dáma* with different frequencies in the first person singular. Of all the interviewed speakers, 22 used only dative; five used both dative and nominative and three used only nominative in the first person singular. Within the first group, there were two speakers that produced more than 10 tokens of *dáma* with a first person singular subject. It seems likely that these speakers use a dative subject more or less exclusively with a first person singular subject. On the other hand, the speakers that used only nominative didn't produce enough tokens to warrant the conclusion that they hardly ever use a dative subject.

3.3. Third person plural

Of the 53 examples of *dáma* with a third person plural subject in the interviews, there were 45 nominative subjects (from 19 speakers) and 8 dative subjects (from 6 speakers). Thus, nominative is almost six times more common than dative in third person plural. Examples of both these variants are shown in (21) and (22):

- (21) a. **Teim** *dámar* *best* *heitan* *mat* (woman, 42)
they.DAT *like.3S* *best* *hot.ACC* *food.ACC*
- b. **Teimum** *dámar* *væl* *føroyskan* *mat* (girl, 21)
they.DAT *like.3S* *well* *Faroese.ACC* *Food.ACC*
- c. *Tað* *dámar* **teimum** *væl* (woman, 58)
that.ACC *like.3S* *they.DAT* *well*
- (22) a. *Tað* *dáma* **míni** **børn** *væl* (woman, 42)
that.ACC *like.3PL* *my.NOM* *children.NOM* *well*
- b. **Tey** *dáma* *væl* *at* *spæla* *eitt* *sindur* (boy, 16)
they.ACC *like.3PL* *well* *to* *play* *a* *bit*

- c. **Summir útlendingar** dáma tað væl (boy, 18)
some.NOM foreigners.NOM like.3PL it.ACC well

All the speakers using dative also used nominative, i.e. nobody produced only dative subjects with *dáma* in third person plural. More surprisingly, none of the 8 dative examples had number agreement with the finite verb. This is at odds with the results for (3b,c) where number agreement with a dative subject was judged to be better than non-agreement but since there were only 8 examples this may not be particularly meaningful.¹³ Indeed, I have found various online examples of number agreement with a dative subject and my informants accept the following sentences:

- (23) a. Vit vóna at **teimum** dáma hugskotið
we hope that they.DAT like.3PL idea.the.ACC
- b. **Liðunum** mangla venjara
teams.the.DAT need.3PL trainer.ACC
- c. **Børnunum** tørva eina góða fyrimynd
children.the.DAT need.3PL a.ACC good.ACC role.model.ACC

These examples involve three different verbs (*dáma*, *mangla* and *tørva*) with a third person plural subject and my informants feel that number agreement is preferable to non-agreement here. It appears that number agreement with a dative subject in first or second person plural is less acceptable in Faroese but this requires further investigation.

As we have seen, there is a strong preference for nominative over dative with third person plural subjects. This preference was even shown by speakers who only used dative with a first person subject of *dáma* in the interviews. By contrast, there is a clear preference for dative over nominative in first person singular. The reason why the dative subject of *dáma* is most widely used in first person singular is presumably that *dáma*, being a psych-verb with an experiencer subject, is more common in first person singular than any other person (cf. the statistics for Icelandic psych-verbs reported in Friðriksson 2008). As a result, it is easier for children to learn the dative with a first person singular subject than a third person plural subject. That first person singular subjects preserve irregular case marking better than other subjects can also be seen in Dative Substitution affecting accusative experiencer subjects in Icelandic (see Svavarsdóttir 1982 and Jónsson and Eythórsson 2005).

¹³ It is noteworthy that all of these examples had a personal pronoun in the dative plural, i.e. either *teimum* or the more formal variant *teim*.

4. Analysis

4.1. The Covert Nominative Hypothesis

The key point of my analysis is that dative subjects in finite clauses in Faroese have nominative case which is not morphologically realized. For concreteness, I will refer to this as the Covert Nominative Hypothesis (CNH). I will assume that the covert nominative is required because finite T in Faroese must assign nominative case to a DP in [Spec,T], the subject position. Thus, the covert nominative is driven by the need for a nominative element in subject position, not the need of the dative subject for positional licensing.¹⁴ As we will see in 4.2 and 4.3 below, this view has important implications for a comparative analysis of dative subjects in Faroese vs. Icelandic.

The CNH entails that there is no variation between dative and nominative case on subjects; rather, since nominative is always assigned, the variation is between the presence or absence of dative case. A crucial assumption behind the CNH is that a DP bearing both (lexical) dative case and (structural) nominative case will only realize the dative because it is a more highly specified case (see Bejar and Massam 1999 for relevant discussion and cross-linguistic data). This rules out the possibility of covert dative case, something which is not empirically motivated for Faroese. For instance, if a nominative subject of *dáma* had covert dative in Faroese, we might expect the dative to block person agreement between the subject and the finite verb, contrary to fact.

The main motivation for the CNH is that dative subjects may trigger plural agreement with the finite verb as exemplified in (3b,c) and (23). The former examples are repeated in (24) below:

- (24) a. **Nógvum** **kvinnum** dámar mannfólk við eitt sindur
many.DAT women.DAT like.3S men.ACC with a bit
 av búki
of belly
- b. **Nógvum** **kvinnum** dáma mannfólk við eitt sindur
many.DAT women.DAT like.3PL men.ACC with a bit
 av búki
of belly

Recall that (24b) was accepted by 48,8% of the informants but this doesn't mean that only about half of the native speakers of Faroese allow a dative

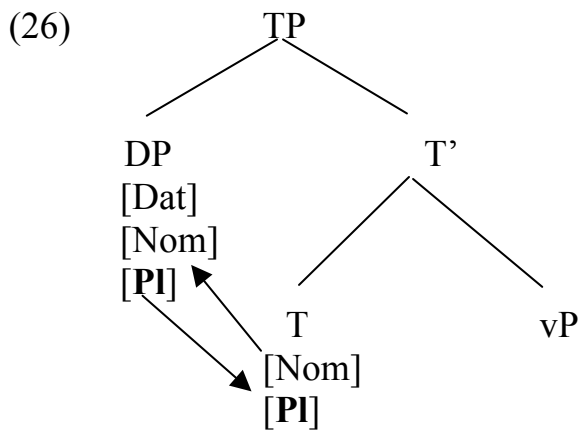
¹⁴ Presumably, this requirement can be fulfilled by the expletive *tað* but sentences that could be analyzed as involving a null expletive or examples of Stylistic Fronting are potentially problematic for my approach.

subject to control number agreement. In a written survey of 242 informants conducted in 2006, 60,2% accepted (25a) below and 78,6% accepted (25b).

- (25) a. **Teimum** dáma at vera saman í bólki
they.DAT like.3PL to be together in band
- b. **Teimum** dámar at renna kapp
they.DAT like.3S to run raise

These results suggest that agreement as well as non-agreement with dative plural subjects is widely accepted by native speakers of Faroese; the results also match what I have been able to determine in consultations with many native speakers this year. Note that the informants evaluated (25a) and (25b) as two independent examples and this may explain why the acceptability rates for (25a,b) are higher than for (24a,b). It may also have played a role that the subject in (25a,b) was a pronoun.

Under the CNH, dative subjects can trigger number agreement with the finite verb in Faroese by virtue of having covert nominative case. The basic idea is that nominative case is assigned in Spec,T by T, thereby establishing a link between T and the dative subject, and this link makes it possible for the subject to control number agreement on the finite verb. This is sketched in (26) below:



Number agreement with a dative subject is not obligatory and this relates to the status of the nominative as an extra case on a DP that already has dative case. More concretely, we can assume that the dative DP is base-generated without a nominative case feature and acquires this feature only after it has moved to Spec,T. In other words, covert nominative is *assigned* by T rather than *checked* (see Bejar and Massam 1999) and this has consequences for number agreement. Assignment of nominative case may also be the reason

why a covert nominative is not sufficient to trigger person agreement with a dative subject in Faroese. This is illustrated in (27):¹⁵

- (27) * **Mær** dámi Hasa bókina
I.DAT like.IS this.ACC book.the.ACC

Thus, person agreement is more restricted than number agreement and this can also be seen in Icelandic where nominative objects may control number agreement on the finite verb but cannot trigger person agreement (see further in 4.2 below).

Although interesting, the agreement facts discussed above do not by themselves provide strong support for the CNH. Therefore, I would like to add another argument for the CNH, which comes from the behaviour of the anaphoric element *sjálvur* ‘self’. When used with a dative subject, *sjálvur* preferably takes a nominative form in agreement with the covert nominative. In the survey from 2006 discussed earlier, the informants were presented with the pair in (28) and asked if they felt that one variant was better than the other. The result was that 58,2% liked (28a) best, 30,6% opted for (28b) and 11,2% thought that both examples were equally acceptable.

- (28) a. **Sjálvur** dámar honum ikki at lurta eftir tónleiki
self.NOM likes he.DAT not to listen to music
- b. **Sjálvum** dámar honum ikki at lurta eftir tónleiki
self.DAT likes he.DAT not to listen to music

Although nominative may have been selected in (28a) by some speakers as the default case in Faroese, this cannot explain why nominative was strongly preferred to dative here as will become apparent when we compare (28a,b) to similar examples Icelandic (see 4.2 below).

4.2. No covert nominative in Icelandic

We now turn to the question whether the non-nominative subjects in Icelandic have covert nominative case. The answer is no since there is virtually no empirical evidence for the CNH in Icelandic (as already pointed out by Sigurðsson 1992), although it is often assumed that non-nominative subjects in Icelandic require covert structural case for positional licensing (see Jónsson 1996 and references cited there).

¹⁵ To show lack of person agreement with *dáma* it is necessary to use the first person singular since there are no person distinctions in the plural and 2nd person singular has the same form as the default 3rd person singular (*dámar*).

Icelandic has a much bigger class of verbs taking non-nominative subjects than Faroese (see Jónsson 2003 for an overview) but we will focus here on verbs with experiencer subjects. Among these verbs, innovative nominative case is quite rare but dative case is spreading at the expense of accusative (see Jónsson and Eythórsson 2005 and references cited there). There is also a clear contrast between Icelandic and Faroese with respect to agreement. As shown in (29) below, the finite verb cannot agree in number with dative subjects in Icelandic:¹⁶

- (29) a. **Okkur** líkar þessi matur
 we.DAT like.3S this.NOM food.NOM
- b. * **Okkur** líkum þessi matur
 we.DAT like.1PL this.NOM food.NOM

In view of this, we can conclude that the language learner will not have any real evidence that covert nominative is assigned when dative or accusative experiencers appear in subject position in Icelandic.

The finite verb in (29) must be third person singular, irrespective of the person and number of the subject. However, plural agreement with a nominative object is possible, as in (30) below, but person agreement is excluded, as shown in (31).

- (30) a. Honum líkar þessir litir (Icelandic)
 he.DAT like.3S these.NOM colors.NOM
- b. Honum líka þessir litir
 he.DAT like.3PL these.NOM colors.NOM
- (31) * Honum líkum við (Icelandic)
 he-DAT like-1PL we-NOM
 ‘He likes us.’

A further indication that the CNH is not correct for Icelandic comes from the anaphoric element *sjálfur* ‘self’. As shown in (28), nominative is better than dative when Faroese *sjálvur* ‘self’ is used with a dative subject, but the preferences are clearly reversed in Icelandic, as shown in (32):

- (32) a. ? **Sjálfur** líkar honum ekki að hlusta á tónlist
 self.NOM like.3S he.DAT not to listen to music

¹⁶ The object in (29) is nominative, not accusative. We will return shortly to this important difference between Icelandic and Faroese.

- b. **Sjálfum líkar** honum ekki að hlusta á tónlist
self.DAT like.3S he.DAT not to listen to music

The contrast between (32a) and (32b) is easily explained if the dative subject does not have covert nominative case. On that view, the nominative in (32a) is acceptable to the extent that default nominative case is possible in such cases, but (32b) is perfectly fine because it involves case agreement between the subject and *sjálfur*.

4.3. Accusative vs. nominative objects

The CNH offers an interesting way of explaining an important difference between Faroese and Icelandic, the fact that two-place verbs with dative subjects take accusative objects in Faroese but nominative objects in Icelandic.¹⁷ This is shown in (33) below:

- (33) a. Mær dámar **bókina** (Faroese)
I.DAT like.3S book.the. ACC
- b. Mær líkar **bókin** (Icelandic)
I.DAT like.3S book.the. NOM

On the standard assumption that dative experiencers are internal arguments, the Faroese example in (33a) shows accusative case assignment to an object in the absence of an external argument, a clear violation of Burzio's Generalization. This is unproblematic under the CNH, if we assume that Burzio's Generalization should be replaced by a requirement that nominative case take priority over structural accusative case (see Yip, Maling and Jackendoff 1987, Haider 2000 and Woolford 2003, 2007 among many others). In other words: Nominative case on the subject, whether morphologically expressed or not, makes structural accusative case assignment possible. For concreteness, we can refer to this the Nominative First Requirement (NFR). The NFR correctly predicts that accusative case assignment to the object is possible in Faroese examples like (33a) due to the covert nominative case assigned to the subject. However, since there is no covert nominative in Icelandic, accusative case assignment by verbs like *líka* 'like' is ruled out as a violation of the NFR and the object is assigned nominative case by T.

Note, however, that some verbs with accusative experiencer subjects take accusative objects in Icelandic and this holds even if the accusative subject is replaced by a dative subject. One of these verbs is *vanta* 'lack':

¹⁷ As I will discuss shortly, there are some exceptions to these patterns.

- (34) a. Mig vantar nýja skó (Icelandic)
 I-ACC need-3S new-ACC shoes-ACC
- b. Mér vantar nýja skó
 I-DAT need-3S new-ACC shoes-ACC

Yip, Maling and Jackendoff (1987) have shown that accusative objects with verbs like *vanta* ‘lack’ in Icelandic have lexical case. Hence, there is no violation of the NFR as the NFR does not affect the assignment of lexical case. In contrast to Icelandic, there is no evidence in Faroese of lexical accusative case on objects, but this is not surprising since subjects with lexical accusative case have more or less disappeared (see Eythórsson and Jónsson 2003 and Jónsson and Eythórsson 2005).

Thráinsson et al. (2004:229) mention that two verbs with dative subjects in Faroese, *eydnast* ‘succeed’ and *tróta* ‘run out of’, may take a nominative object, at least for some speakers. They provide the following examples in support of their claim:

- (35) a. Mær eydnaðist **túrurin** / *túrin væl
 I.DAT succeeded trip.the.NOM / *trip.the.ACC well
 ‘The trip turned out nicely for me.’
- b. Henni treyt pening / (?)peningur
 she.DAT ran.out.of.3S money.ACC / money.NOM
 ‘She ran out of money.’

As we have already discussed in connection with the examples in (14a,b), the dative argument of *eydnast* is preferably an object. Moreover, it is not even clear that the dative in (35a) is a subject because (35a) is consistent with an analysis where the dative is a topicalized object and the nominative is a subject.¹⁸ In fact, Thráinsson et al. (2004:229) point out that some speakers strongly prefer the nominative-first order here (*Túrurin eydnaðist mær væl*), suggesting that the nominative is the subject.

With *tróta*, it is important to keep in mind that this verb is rarely used in the spoken language, especially when it takes two arguments. Therefore, native speakers may judge a nominative object with *tróta* as acceptable on the basis of something that they have read, not as a reflection of actual language use.

¹⁸ This is also true for (35b) but Thráinsson et al. (2004:229) provide an additional example showing the nominative with *tróta* in an unambiguous object position.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed the results of a recent survey of dative subjects in Faroese. The results indicate that dative subjects are gradually disappearing and this manifests itself in three ways. First, there is a general preference for nominative subjects over of dative subjects, at least in third person plural. Second, dative subjects may trigger number agreement with the finite verb as if they were nominative subjects. Third, the dative arguments of the verbs *dáma* ‘like’ and *eydnast* ‘succeed’ need not move by DP-movement to subject position.

I have argued for the Covert Nominative Hypothesis (CNH), according to which dative subjects in Faroese have nominative case which is not morphologically realized. The main evidence for the CNH comes from agreement but I have also shown how the CNH can be used to explain the fact that verbs with dative subjects take accusative objects in Faroese but nominative objects in Icelandic.

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