Dative and Nominative Substitution in Icelandic: An OT-RRG Account

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This paper aims to provide an OT-RRG account of dative substitution [DS] and nominative substitution [NS] in Icelandic, illustrated in (1) and (2) (Smith 1994; Barðdal 2011):

(1)   a.   Mig/Mér   langar   í   ís.
                  1SG.ACC/DAT   long.3SG.PRS   in   ice-cream
                  'I want an ice cream.'

         b.   Mig/Mér   dreymdi   draum.
                  1SG.ACC/DAT   dream.PST   dream.ACC
                  'I had a dream.'

         c.   Mig   brestur   kjark.
                  1SG.ACC   lack.3SG.PRS   courage.ACC

         d.   Mér   brestur   kjarkur.
                  1SG.DAT   lack.3SG.PRS   courage.NOM
                  'I lack courage.'

(2)   a.   Bátinn/Báturinn   rak   til   hafs.
                  the.boat.ACC/NOM   drive.3SG.PST   to   sea
                  'The boat drifted to sea.'

         b.   Bátnum/Báturinn   hvolfdi.
                  the.boat.DAT/NOM   turn-around.3SG.PST
                  'The boat capsized.'

DS is triggered by an analogy based on dative-marked experiencer subject arguments [ESAs], while NS is an analogy based on the fact that most subjects receive nominative case and applies to oblique-marked intransitive subjects and theme arguments of two-place psych verbs (Smith 1994; Eythórsson 2000). DS applies to accusative-marked ESAs, while NS exhibits no such restriction. Many attempts have been made to explain DS and NS, but most of them treat such uses of accusative case as in (1) and (2) as 'quirky' and don't seek the connection between these 'quirky' uses of accusative case and its canonical uses. Given the case assignment constraints in (3) and the Completeness Constraint [CC] (which requires every semantic argument of a verb to receive overt morphosyntactic realization) (Van Valin 2005), I make three proposals in (4):

(3)   a.   The highest-ranking macrorole argument receives nominative case.
         b.   Non-macrorole core arguments receive dative case.
         c.   Undergoer arguments receive accusative case.

(4)   a.   Impersonal constructions [ICs] suspend the ranking between actor and undergoer.
         b.   Constraint Ranking for Icelandic: CC >> (3a) >> (3b) >> (3c)
         c.   DS leads hearers to conduct input (or lexicon) optimization in terms of which to reanalyze the input representation for a given morphosyntactic form (in this case, an analogy-induced case frame), while NS applies to oblique-marked nominal arguments that (potentially) function as the PSA of the clause and (like DS) may lead hearers to reanalyze their input representations.

(4a) disables (3a) in ICs and accounts for why ICs have no nominative-marked argument. (4b) outputs the ACC-ACC case frame (see Table 1) (under the assumption that the two impersonal psych verbs in (1b)-(1d) used to receive two macroroles (actor and undergoer)) and requires the

actor argument of *reka* in (2a) to receive accusative case. Furthermore, a frequent occurrence of DS leads hearers to reanalyze *dreyma* 'dream' and *bresta* 'lack' in (1) as involving a combination of non-macrorole and undergoer rather than that of actor and undergoer (as shown in Table 2), while forcing hearers to reanalyze the experiencer argument of *langa* 'long' in (1a) as a non-macrorole rather than an undergoer. These input reanalyses cut the connection between the accusative marking of the ESAs and their macrorole status and have made their accusative marking truly quirky (see Table 3). Finally, NS applies to oblique-marked arguments that serve as the PSA of the clause (as illustrated by the case alternations in (2a,b) and the alternation between (1c) and (1d)). I propose that when there is more than one candidate for the PSA within the clause, the target of NS is determined by whether the case frame that results from NS allows hearers to correctly recover the input. For example, application of NS to the theme argument of *bresta* allows hearers to recover the combination of non-macrorole and undergoer (as shown in Table 4) as its input, while application of NS to the experiencer argument of *bresta* yields the NOM-ACC case frame and leads hearers to reason that *bresta* involves a pair of actor and undergoer rather than that of non-macrorole and undergoer. This contrast explains why NS does not apply to experiencer arguments of *bresta* and many other two-place impersonal psych verbs. To summarize, I propose that DS and NS are analogy-based case alternations accommodated into (4b) through (4a) and input optimization.

Table 1: Generation of the ACC-ACC Case Frame in (1b,c)

Input: ACT-UND	CC	(3a)	(3b)	(3c)
☞ACC-ACC				*
ACC-DAT			*!	**
DAT-ACC			*!	
DAT-DAT			*!*	*

Table 2: DS-induced Input Optimization

Output: DAT-ACC	CC	(3a)	(3b)	(3c)
ACT-UND			*!	
☞NonMR-UND				

Table 3: Emergence of the Quirky Accusative Case

Experiencer arguments	DAT ('sickness') DS ⟶	DAT (unmarked)
	ACC (unmarked)	ACC ('quirky')
Macrorole status	Actor ⟶	Non-macrorole

Table 4: Input Optimization of the DAT-NOM Case Frame in (1d)

Input: DAT-NOM	CC	(3a)	(3b)	(3c)
ACT-UND			*!	
☞NonMR-UND				*

References

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