

# A Brief History of Icelandic Weather Verbs\*

## Syntax, Semantics and Argument Structure

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Weather verbs in Icelandic are not “no-argument” predicates, but occur with a quasi-argument (non-referential *pro*) and can also take full NPs, in nominative, accusative or dative case. The use of the cases can be explained by the different origins of these verbs, most of which can be traced back to verbs with a more general meaning. Importantly, weather verbs with a full NP have continued to exist from Old to Modern Icelandic. In the modern language the subjecthood of these NPs can be established, and a subject analysis is also possible for Old Icelandic. We argue that with a number of verbs there was a development from an intransitive taking either nominative or oblique subject NP to a weather verb without an overt argument. This development was triggered by the availability of *pro*-drop in Old Icelandic. By assumption, *pro* could be reanalyzed as a covert quasi-argument and, as a consequence, the coding of the weather event shifted from an Argument-Predicate Type to a Predicate Type (cf. Eriksen et al. 2010, 2012). Apparently, the covert pronoun (referential *pro*) and the covert quasi-argument coexisted for some time, until referential *pro* became severely restricted in early Modern Icelandic. This led to the emergence of “weather-*hann*”, which was originally a pronoun but was reanalyzed as an overt quasi-argument. There ensued a competition between structures with overt and covert quasi-arguments. Contrary to what might have been expected, weather-*hann* never gained ground in Icelandic, but the unexpressed quasi-argument remains the norm. This fact is comprehensible in light of the general diachronic stability of Icelandic grammar.

## 1 Introduction

Weather verbs in Icelandic have generally been considered to be “no argument predicates” (Thráinsson 2007:267, Sigurðsson 1989:315ff., Nygaard 1905:6–7). This goes for both prototypical weather verbs such as *rigna* ‘rain’ (1a) and other weather verbs which pattern with the former, e.g., *hvesa* ‘get windy’ and *kólna* ‘get cold’ (1b).

- (1) a. Í gær      rigndi.  
          yesterday rained  
          ‘Yesterday it rained’  
      b. Í gær      hvesti/kólnaði.  
          yesterday got-windy/got-cold  
          ‘Yesterday it got windy/got cold.’

In this paper we argue against the standard view that weather verbs in Icelandic are “no-argument predicates”. Based on empirical evidence drawn from an extensive survey of weather

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verbs in Old and Modern Icelandic, we present data such as in (2), where weather verbs are accompanied by overt NPs, occurring either in the nominative, accusative or dative case.

- (2) a. **Vindurinn** kólnar.  
 the-wind.NOM gets-cold  
 ‘The wind gets cold.’  
 b. **Vindinn** hvessir.  
 the-wind.ACC gets-windy  
 ‘It gets windy.’  
 c. **Eldi** rignir.  
 fire.DAT rains  
 ‘It rains fire.’

It can be demonstrated that in Modern Icelandic both the nominative and the oblique NPs are syntactic subjects. Although examples like the ones in (2) are well attested throughout the history of Icelandic, they have so far received little scholarly attention.

A further fact to account for is the different distribution of the elements *það* and *hann* which emerged in early Modern Icelandic. While *það* does not only occur in clauses containing weather verbs but also in certain other types of declarative clauses (e.g., impersonal and existential constructions), *hann* is confined to meteorological expressions. Moreover, *það* is restricted to clause-initial position (3), but *hann* takes part in subject-verb inversion (4).

- (3) a. **Það** rignir mikið í dag.  
 it rains much today  
 ‘It rains a lot today.’  
 b. Í dag rignir (\***það**) mikið.  
 today rains it much
- (4) a. **Hann** rignir mikið í dag.  
 he rains much today  
 ‘It rains a lot today.’  
 b. Í dag rignir **hann** mikið.  
 today rains he much  
 ‘Today it rains a lot.’

Traditionally, the term “expletive” has been used about the element *það*, while *hann* with weather verbs has been called either a pronoun or simply *veður-hann* (“weather-*hann*”) (see, e.g., Thráinsson 2005:339, who says that *hann* is a pronoun although it is not clear what it refers to, and Barðdal 2015b:398, who claims that *hann* counts as an argument). In this paper we concur with the usual analysis of *það* as a “filler” or a “placeholder” without an argument status (e.g. Sigurðsson 2006), whereas we propose that weather-*hann* is a non-referential argument, i.e., a quasi-argument (cf. Chomsky 1981:325, Sigurðsson 1993, Rizzi 2000:43–44). We further claim that while quasi-arguments were covert in Old Icelandic, in Modern Icelandic they can be either covert (as non-referential *pro*) or overt (as weather-*hann*).

As our investigation shows, a considerable stability is observed with weather verbs in the history of Icelandic. Aside from the fact that the lexical items are nearly all the same, the continuity in syntax can in particular be detected in the use of NPs and quasi-arguments with weather verbs which has survived from Old to Modern Icelandic. The introduction of the filler *það* and of weather-*hann* can be regarded manifestations of more general syntactic changes in Icelandic, not special to weather verbs. These changes involve the rise of “expletive” constructions and the placement of severe restrictions on *pro-drop*. The only change specifically targeting weather verbs is the tendency – already present in Old Icelandic – to reanalyze referential pronouns as a non-referential ones. We attribute the fact that the non-prototypical weather verbs (1b) can occur without a visible subject to a reanalysis of *pro* in Old Icelandic as a quasi-argument.

The paper is organized as follows: In section 2 we present the empirical evidence based on our surveys of weather verbs in Old and Modern Icelandic. In section 3 we discuss some significant changes affecting weather verbs from in the history of Icelandic. Section 4 deals with the position of weather verb in main and embedded clauses. In section 5 we present our analysis of the subject properties which apply to weather verbs. Finally, in section 6, on the origins of weather verbs, we propose a hypothesis on how such verbs emerged historically. Section 7 concludes the paper.

## 2 The empirical evidence

### 2.1 The survey

The discussion and analysis in this paper is based on empirical evidence drawn from an extensive survey of weather verbs in Old and Modern Icelandic. We searched for the following verbs (including all inflectional forms, but omitting the present and past participle in an adjectival use), all of which are attested in Modern Icelandic:

- (5) *birta* ‘brighten’, *blása* ‘blow’, *dimma* ‘get dark’, *drífa* ‘snow’, *fenna* ‘snow’, *frysta* ‘freeze’, *hlána* ‘thaw’, *hlýna* ‘get warm’, *hvessa* ‘get windy’, *kólna* ‘get cold’, *lygna* ‘abate (of wind)’, *lýsa* ‘brighten’, *lægja* ‘abate (of wind)’, *myrkva* ‘get dark’, *rigna* ‘rain’, *rökkva* ‘get dark’, *skyggja* ‘get dark’, *snjóa* ‘snow’, *þiðna* ‘thaw, melt’

For reasons of space, our discussion in this article is focused on only a subset of these verbs.

In the Modern Icelandic part of the survey we used mainly two databases, *Tímarit.is* (an internet collection of Icelandic periodicals) and *Ritmálsskrá Orðabókar Háskólans* (ROH, The University of Iceland Lexicon Project Written Language Register), with the addition of the search engine *Google*. This search aimed at verifying the attestation of the relevant verbs in Modern Icelandic, as well as their syntactic behavior and their ability to occur with an NP. The verbs are shown in Table 1, where they are classified according to semantic field, with additional information on the case of the NP they may take. Note that although some of the verbs seem to have the same meaning, there may be fine semantic nuances which are not

captured by the relevant English gloss. Furthermore, while some verbs represent the default usage, others are mostly confined to certain contexts or registers.

Table 1. Weather verbs in Modern Icelandic taking an NP (nominative, accusative, or dative)

MODERN ICELANDIC							
		NOM	ACC	DAT			
		NOM	ACC	DAT	NOM	ACC	DAT
precipitation	<i>drífa</i> 'snow'	x	x		<i>frysta</i> 'freeze'		
	<i>fenna</i> 'snow'		x		<i>hlána</i> 'thaw'	x	
	<i>rigna</i> 'rain'	x		x	<i>hlýna</i> 'get warm'	x	
	<i>snjóa</i> 'snow'			x	<i>kólna</i> 'get cold'	x	
				<i>þiðna</i> 'thaw, melt'	x		
wind	<i>blása</i> 'blow'	x	x		<i>birta</i> 'brighten'	x	x
	<i>hvesa</i> 'get windy'	x	x		<i>dimma</i> 'get dark'	x	x
	<i>lygna</i> 'abate (of wind)'	x	x		<i>lýsa</i> 'brighten'	x	
	<i>lægja</i> 'abate (of wind)'	x	x		<i>myrkva</i> 'get dark'		
					<i>rökkva</i> 'get dark'		x
				<i>skyggja</i> 'get dark'		x	

In the Old Icelandic part of our investigation we made use of *Íslenskt textasafn* (ÍT, The Icelandic Text Collection) and *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (ONP, A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose).<sup>1</sup> In this article Old Icelandic examples are written in a normalized spelling, irrespective of the text sources. As a rule, it is indicated which collection they are taken from (ÍT or ONP).

The search in ÍT and ONP resulted in examples of all the verbs in (5), with only two exceptions, *hlýna* 'get warm' and *skyggja* 'get dark' (shown in brackets in the tables below). Moreover, while all the verbs in our Old Icelandic material, except *lægja* 'abate' and *þiðna* 'thaw, melt', occur without an NP, most of them also occur with an NP in nominative, accusative or dative case. The verbs are shown in Table 2, where they are classified in the same way as the Modern Icelandic ones in Table 1. In addition, Table 3 shows the frequency of a given verb occurring with or without an NP in Old Icelandic.

<sup>1</sup> In addition to ÍT and ONP, we also searched the Icelandic Parsed Historical Corpus (IcePaHC); however, this search only yielded a part of the results already obtained, but no new results.

Table 2. Weather verbs in Old Icelandic taking an NP (nominative, accusative, or dative)

OLD ICELANDIC									
		NOM	ACC	DAT			NOM	ACC	DAT
precipitation	<i>drífa</i> 'snow'	x	x	x	phase change	<i>frysta</i> 'freeze'		x	
	<i>fenna</i> 'snow'		x			<i>hlána</i> 'thaw'	x		
	<i>rigna</i> 'rain'	x		x		<i>(hlýna)</i> 'get warm'			
	<i>snjóa</i> 'snow'					<i>kólna</i> 'get cold'	x		
					<i>þiðna</i> 'thaw, melt'	x			
wind	<i>blása</i> 'blow'	x	x		brightness	<i>birta</i> 'brighten'			x
	<i>hvessa</i> 'get windy'		x			<i>dimma</i> 'get dark'			x
	<i>lygna</i> 'abate (of wind)'		x			<i>lýsa</i> 'brighten'			x
	<i>lægja</i> 'abate (of wind)'		x			<i>myrkva</i> 'get dark'			x
						<i>rökkva</i> 'get dark'			
					<i>(skyggja)</i> 'get dark'				

Table 3. Frequency of weather verbs in Old Icelandic with and without an NP (no NP is indicated by Ø)

OLD ICELANDIC									
		NP	Ø	SUM			NP	Ø	SUM
precipitation	<i>drífa</i> 'snow'	5	9	14	phase change	<i>frysta</i> 'freeze'	3	2	5
	<i>fenna</i> 'snow'	4	0	4		<i>hlána</i> 'thaw'	2	1	3
	<i>rigna</i> 'rain'	28	16	44		<i>(hlýna)</i> 'get warm'			
	<i>snjóa</i> 'snow'	0	6	6		<i>kólna</i> 'get cold'	7	3	10
					<i>þiðna</i> 'thaw, melt'	3	0	3	
wind	<i>blása</i> 'blow'	7	2	9	brightness	<i>birta</i> 'brighten'	5	4	9
	<i>hvessa</i> 'get windy'	7	5	12		<i>dimma</i> 'get dark'	1	9	10
	<i>lygna</i> 'abate (of wind)'	1	2	3		<i>lýsa</i> 'brighten'	1	70	71
	<i>lægja</i> 'abate (of wind)'	10	0	10		<i>myrkva</i> 'get dark'	4	25	29
						<i>rökkva</i> 'get dark'	0	7	7
					<i>(skyggja)</i> 'get dark'				

As shown in Table 3, the frequency of weather verbs in Old Icelandic varies considerably. Some of the verbs are relatively common, whereas other verbs are rare. What is perhaps most interesting is the low token frequency of weather verbs in Old Icelandic in general. On the other hand, weather nouns are more common, e.g., *veður* 'weather' (occurring 194 times according to ONP), *snjór/snær* 'snow' (126 times), *vindur* 'wind' (96 times) and *regn* 'rain' (71 times). Presumably, the rarity of weather verbs in Old Icelandic is, at least partly, a consequence of the fact that other methods were employed in weather descriptions. Instead of the verbs *hvessa* 'get windy' and *lygna* 'abate (of wind)', for example, one can find a

paraphrase with a verb with a more general meaning (*falla* ‘fall’, *gera* ‘do’) and a weather noun (*veðrið* ‘the weather’, *logn* ‘calm’), as in (6).

- (6) ...og er morgnaði, féll **veðrið** og gerði **logn**.  
 and when came-morning fell the-weather and made wind-still  
 ‘... and when it dawned the weather fell still.’ (ÍT, Egils saga, ch. 58)

The same can be said of *snjóa* ‘snow’ and *rigna* ‘rain’ which are often replaced by a verb and a weather noun, as in (7):

- (7) a. ...þá var það á einni nótt, að féll **snjór** mikill...  
 then was it on one night that fell snow much  
 ‘Then it happened one night that a lot of snow fell...’ (ÍT, Egils saga, ch. 72)  
 b. Þá gerði á **regn** mikið.  
 then made on rain much  
 ‘Then came a great rain.’ (ÍT, Droplaugasona saga, ch. 1)

## 2.2 Weather verbs without an NP

Weather verbs occurring without an NP are of two types: (i) prototypical weather verbs, such as *rigna* ‘rain’ and *snjóa* ‘snow’ (8), and (ii) verbs which have a more general meaning but pattern with the prototypical weather verbs in meteorological contexts. The verbs of the latter type include *hvesa* ‘get windy’ and *lægja* ‘abate’, which have the basic meaning ‘sharpen’ and ‘lower’ respectively, and *kólna* ‘get cold’ and *hlýna* ‘get warm’, both of which are also used in more general contexts. Examples of two of these verbs from Old Icelandic are given in (9). Corresponding usage is also found in Modern Icelandic, so there is no need to give examples here.

- (8) a. Þann tíma voru vætur svá miklar, at bæði rigndi nætr ok daga.  
 that time were rains so great that both rained nights and days  
 ‘During that time the rain was so great that it rained night and day.’  
 (ONP, Hák81 594<sup>11</sup>)  
 b. En áður þeir sigldu brott snjáfaði mjök á fjöll.  
 but before they sailed away snowed much on mountains  
 ‘But before they sailed away it snowed a lot up in the mountains.’ (ONP, ÓT<sup>I</sup> 256<sup>10</sup>)
- (9) a. Þá hvessti svo að varla var vaðhæft á konungsskipinu.  
 then got-windy so that hardly was wadeable on the-king’s-ship  
 ‘Then it got so windy that it was hardly possible to wade on the king’s ship.’  
 (ONP, HákFris 462<sup>28</sup>)  
 b. ...nú tók at kólna.  
 now took to get-cold.INF  
 ‘...now it started to get cold.’ (ONP, Jvs7 29<sup>32</sup>)

These examples are in accordance with traditional ideas that weather verbs occur without an NP. As shown in the following, however, these verbs can also be accompanied by NPs in Icelandic, either in nominative, accusative or dative case. This fact has so far received little attention, as stated in section 1 above.

## 2.3 Weather verbs with an NP

### 2.3.1 Nominative

An NP with the verb *kólna* ‘get cold’ is always in the nominative case, both in Old and Modern Icelandic. This is clear in the Old Icelandic example in (10a), where the noun *veðráttá* ‘weather condition, weather’ is unambiguously nominative. On the other hand, the noun *veðrið* ‘the weather’ in (10b) is identical in nominative and accusative case, and hence the form is ambiguous; in light of examples like (10a), however, it stands to reason that it is in fact nominative.

- (10) a. ...þá kólnar **veðráttá**.  
 then cools weather-condition.NOM  
 ‘...then the weather gets cold.’ (ONP, Enc<sup>II</sup>624 122<sup>11</sup>)
- b. En er hann kom upp á heiðina kólnaði **veðrið**.  
 but when he came up on the-heath got-cold the-weather.NOM  
 ‘But when he arrived up on the heath the weather got cold.’  
 (ÍT, Eyrbyggja saga, ch. 40)

The verb *hlýna* ‘get warm’ is not attested in our Old Icelandic data. In Modern Icelandic, however, it is found with a nominative, just like *kólna* ‘get cold’. In the Modern Icelandic examples in (11) both verbs are accompanied by the definite noun *vindurinn* ‘the wind’.

- (11) a. Á sama augnabliki var eins og **vindurinn** kólnaði.  
 on same moment was as if the-wind.NOM got-cold  
 ‘On the same moment it was as if the wind cooled.’  
 ([http://timarit.is/view\\_page\\_init.jsp?pageId=4365584](http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?pageId=4365584))
- b. ...enda hlýnaði **vindurinn** með hækkandi sól.  
 since got-warm the-wind.NOM with rising sun  
 ‘...as a matter of fact the wind got warm when summer approached.’  
 (<http://dalsmynni.123.is/blog/2008/04/28/240472/>)

Note that a nominative NP with *kólna* and *hlýna* is a “theme” and has the meaning ‘something becomes cold/warm’. As an experiencer verb, however, *kólna* and *hlýna* can appear with a dative (*einhverjum kólnar/hlýnar* ‘somebody experiences cold/warmth’). Finally, it should be emphasized that the NP occurring with these verbs can be either indefinite or definite. This use is also observed with other weather verbs, both in Old and Modern Icelandic.

## 2.3.2 Accusative

Unambiguous accusative NPs can be found in Old and Modern Icelandic with the verbs *birta* ‘brighten’ and *lægja* ‘abate’. Note that the use of *birta* with a noun (e.g., *hríð* ‘snowstorm’) involves a different meaning than the use of the verb without a noun. When used without a noun the meaning is simply ‘there is more light’, but the addition of a noun yields a metaphorical reading, i.e., ‘the storm abates (and it becomes brighter)’. With the verb *lægja*, however, the meaning is the same irrespective of the presence or absence of an NP; i.e., it always means ‘abates’.

- (12) a. Birtir nú **hríðina**, ok kemr gott veðr.  
brightens now the-snowstorm.ACC and comes good weather  
‘Now the storm abated and the weather became good.’ (ÍT, Hrana saga hrings, ch. 8)
- b. Þá lægði **storminn** og kvómu þeir heilir til lands.  
then abated the-storm.ACC and came they whole to shore  
‘Then the storm abated and they arrived safely on shore.’  
(ÍT, Helga kviða Hundingsbana II)

The verbs *hvesa* ‘get windy’ and *dimma* ‘get dark’ are attested with an NP in Old and Modern Icelandic. In Old Icelandic the nouns accompanying these verb are ambiguous between being in the nominative and the accusative case, for example *veður* ‘weather’ and *nótt* ‘night’ in (13). In light of later Icelandic, however, we assume that the case of these NPs is accusative (14).

- (13) a. Litlu eftir þetta heyrðu þeir, at **veðr** tók at hvesa...  
little after this heard they that weather.ACC took to get-windy  
‘Shortly after this they heard that the weather started to get windy...’  
(ÍT, Göngu-Hrólf saga)
- b. ...er **nótt** tók at dimma en dag tók at skemma...  
when night.ACC took to get-dark but day.ACC took to shorten  
‘...when the night started to get dark and the day to get shorter...’  
(ONP, Hkr<sup>lx</sup> 256<sup>2</sup>: AM 37 fol<sup>x</sup> “J1”)
- (14) a. ...og brimið vex og **vindinn** hvesir.  
and the-surf grows and the-wind.ACC gets-windy  
‘...and the surf increases and it gets more windy.’  
([http://timarit.is/view\\_page\\_init.jsp?pageId=2138875](http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?pageId=2138875)) (1898)
- b. Þegar **nóttina** dimmir, þá stækkar meira undirvöxtur...  
when the-night.ACC darkens then grows more root  
‘When the night gets darker the roots grow bigger...’  
(<http://www.malefnin.com/ib/topic/6799-nyr-goda-nott-thradur/?page=65>)



## 2.3.3 Dative

When denoting actual rain, the verb *rigna* ‘rain’ is used on its own. However, both in Old and Modern Icelandic *rigna* is also attested with a dative NP. When this dative NP denotes a liquid, it is usually ‘blood’, but NPs denoting more solid phenomena include ‘fire and brimstone’, ‘rocks’, and even ‘manna’ (an edible substance known from the Bible). In (15a) an Old Icelandic example is given of this verb with the noun *blóð* ‘blood’ and in (15b) with *rain* ‘rain’ (which in this case, however, is used metaphorically denoting ‘a battle’).

- (15) a. ...rignir **blóði**.  
 rains blood.DAT  
 ‘...it rains blood.’ (ÍT, Brennu-Njáls saga, ch. 157 (Darraðarljóð 1))
- b. ...rigna getr at **regni** / regnbjóðr, Hávars þegna.  
 rain.INF does to rain.DAT warrior Hávarr.GEN thane.GEN  
 ‘...warrior, it starts to rain the rain of Hávar’s thanes (i.e., a battle begins).’  
 (ÍT, Egils saga, ch. 44)

In Modern Icelandic a dative NP with *rigna* rarely denotes a liquid, although such instances are attested, as seen in (16a). Usually the dative NP denotes abstract concepts such as ‘scolding’ or ‘insults’, but occasionally more tangible phenomena like ‘dogs and cats’, as in (16b). The latter use is most likely due to English influence.

- (16) a. Það rigndi **blóði** í Írak í dag...  
 it rained blood.DAT in Iraq in today  
 ‘It rained blood in Iraq today...’  
 (<http://www.visir.is/blodbad-i-bagdad-i-dag/article/2005509140385>)
- b. ...nema hér rignir **hundum** og **köttum** dag eftir dag.  
 except here rains dogs.DAT and cats.DAT day after day  
 ‘...except here it rains cats and dogs day after day.’  
 (<http://madamhex.blog.is/blog/madamhex/entry/256021/>)

The verb *snjóa* ‘snow’ is not attested in Old Icelandic with an NP. Whether or not this is a coincidence is unclear (only six examples of this verb are known to us from Old Icelandic texts). In Modern Icelandic, however, *snjóa* is very frequent and sometimes appears with a dative NP (17).

- (17) Það snjóaði **fallegum** **stórum**, **hvítum** **flygsum**...  
 it snowed beautiful.DAT big.DAT white.DAT flakes.DAT  
 ‘It snowed beautiful big white flakes...’  
 ([http://bokmenntaborgin.is/?post\\_type=mapplace&p=498](http://bokmenntaborgin.is/?post_type=mapplace&p=498))

The use of a dative NP with *rigna* ‘rain’ and *snjóa* ‘snow’ is of common Germanic origin, as shown by comparative evidence in Old English and Gothic. This dative can in fact be traced back to instrumental case, which is marginally attested in Old English. The use of dative with *rignan/rīnan* ‘rain’ and *snīwan* ‘snow’ in Old English is demonstrated in (18) and the use of instrumental in (19).

- (18) a. Hit ágan rínan xl. daga and xl. nihta tósomne  
 it started rain.INF 40 days and 40 nights together  
**ðæm mæstan réne.**  
 the.DAT most.DAT rain.DAT  
 ‘It started to rain the greatest rain for 40 days and 40 nights.’  
 (Wulfstan, Napier 1883:21617)
- b. Swa **miclum** sniwde.  
 so much.DAT snowed  
 ‘So much snowed.’ (COE Alex 679 (Allen 1995:62))
- (19) And hit þa ongan rinan feowertig daga and feowertig nihta tosomne  
 and it then started rain.INF 40 days and 40 nights together  
**þy mæstan réne.**  
 the.INSTR most.INSTR rain.INSTR  
 ‘And then it started to rain with great rain for 40 days and 40 nights.’  
 (Wulfstan, Napier 1883:206)

### 3 Changes from Old to Modern Icelandic

#### 3.1 Changes in case marking

##### 3.1.1 Nominative Substitution

A change from accusative to nominative case marking is attested with the verbs *birta* ‘brighten’, *dimma* ‘get dark’, *hvessa* ‘get windy’ and *lægja* ‘abate’. Both *birta* and *lægja* appear with an unambiguous accusative already in Old Icelandic. The use of nominative with these verbs is very recent, attested only from the beginning of the 21st century (*lægja* from 2008 and *birta* from 2014).

- (20) a. ...svo nú er bara að bíða eftir að **vindur** lægir.  
 so now is just to wait after that wind.NOM abates  
 ‘So, now we just need to wait until the wind abates.’  
 (<http://gumpurinn.blog.is/blog/gumpurinn/entry/568562/>) (2008)
- b. ...**dagurinn** birtir alltaf þegar þú ert í kring.  
 the-day.NOM brightens always when you are in around  
 ‘... the day brightens when you are around.’  
 ([http://www.pikore.com/m/768905157634923330\\_12314837](http://www.pikore.com/m/768905157634923330_12314837)) (2014)

As mentioned above, the case marking of the nouns occurring with *dimma* ‘get dark’ and *hvessa* ‘get windy’ in Old Icelandic is ambiguous between nominative and accusative. Accusative is, however, attested in later Icelandic along with the more recent nominative (with *dimma* from 1909 and *hvessa* from 2011).

- (21) a. ...vitandi að **vindurinn** hvessir meðfram brúnum.  
 knowing that the-wind.NOM gets-windy along edges  
 ‘...knowing that the it gets windy along the edges.’  
 ([http://www.fjallgongur.is/aevingar/15\\_aevingar\\_jan\\_mars\\_2011.htm](http://www.fjallgongur.is/aevingar/15_aevingar_jan_mars_2011.htm)) (2011)
- b. Þá **nóttin** dimmir, draugar vakna...  
 when the-night.NOM darkens ghosts wake-up  
 ‘When the night gets darker, ghosts wake up...’  
 ([http://timarit.is/view\\_page\\_init.jsp?pageId=2141152](http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?pageId=2141152)) (1909)

A change from an oblique case, including accusative, to nominative is a common tendency in Icelandic, termed Nominative Substitution, and mainly occurs with theme subjects (cf. Halldórsson 1982, Eythórsson 2000, 2002, Jónsson and Eythórsson 2003, 2005, Barðdal 2011, Dunn et al., to appear).

### 3.1.2 Impersonalization

In addition to Nominative Substitution, the reverse change, call it Impersonalization, is also found with Icelandic weather verbs. In Old Icelandic the verb *blása* ‘blow’ takes a nominative subject, as shown in (22), but in Modern Icelandic we occasionally find an accusative with this verb (23), which appears to be an innovation.

- (22) ...sem á blási **fagur** **sunnanvindur**.  
 as on blows fair.NOM southern-wind.NOM  
 ‘...as if a fair southern wind is blowing.’ (ONP, Thom<sup>2</sup> 433<sup>8</sup>)
- (23) **Vindinn** blés og bátnum velti um koll.  
 the-wind.ACC blew and the-boat.DAT turned on top  
 It was windy and the boat capsized.’  
 (<https://www.hugi.is/ljod/greinar/81337/oldukoss/>)

Impersonalization is a sporadic type of change and is attested with a handful of verbs, in particular the experiencer verbs *hlakka til* ‘look forward to’ and *kviða fyrir* ‘be anxious about’ (Eythórsson 2001, 2002, 2015, Barðdal 2011). The occurrence of Impersonalization with *blása* in (23) is of a different kind, as it involves a change from a verb taking an agentive nominative subject to a verb taking an accusative theme subject. Presumably this pattern is analogical to the one found with other “wind” verbs, notably *hvessa* ‘get windy’ and *lægja* ‘abate’ (see section 2.3.2 above).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Note that *blása* ‘blow’ occurs with an accusative as an anticausative verb (Ottosson 2013, Sandal 2011, Barðdal 2015, Cennamo, Eythórsson and Barðdal 2015), which might have been a further motivation for the change.

- (i) ...hafði blásit hauginn.  
 had blown the-mound  
 ‘...the mound had eroded.’ (Cleasby og Vigfússon, Fm. IV, 57)

### 3.2 The filler *það*

The non-referential element *það*, homonymous with the third person neuter pronoun *það* ‘it’, only occurs initially in certain clause types in Modern Icelandic, including those containing weather verbs. It is often called “expletive” but we opt for the more neutral term “filler”; in any case, it is not a quasi-argument, as suggested by the fact that it does not participate in subject-verb inversion.

Unambiguous examples of the element *það* first appear in early Modern Icelandic, in a translation of English folktales from around 1500:

- (24) **Það** var einn mann í Englandi sem fleiri aðrir...  
 it was one man in England as more others  
 There was a man in England, just like many others...’ (Rögvaldsson 2002:22)

The oldest examples of *það* with weather verbs are found in the New Testament translation of Oddur Gottskálksson from 1540 (Rögvaldsson 2002:23). Unsurprisingly, the filler only appears clause-initially in front of the finite verb (25a) and is otherwise absent (25b).

- (25) a. ...og hann bað bænar að **það** skyldi eigi rigna,  
 and he asked prayer that it should not rain  
 og **það** rigndi ekki yfir jörðina í þrjú ár og sex mánaði.  
 and it rained not over the-earth in three years and six months  
 ‘...and he prayed that it would not rain and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.’ (Nýja testamenti Odds Gottskálkssonar, James 5:500)
- b. En þann dag er Lot fór út af Sódóma rigndi ofan  
 but that day when Lot went out from Sodom rained from-above  
 eldi og brennisteini...  
 fire.DAT and brimstone  
 ‘That day, when Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone...’  
 (ÍT, Nýja testamenti Odds Gottskálkssonar, Luke 17:163)

Since these examples occur in translations, it would seem likely that the filler *það* found its way into Icelandic due to foreign influence (Rögvaldsson 2002:23). In other Scandinavian languages there is evidence from the 15th century onwards of a comparable element – an expletive or a quasi-argument (Falk 1993, Larsson 2014) – and in other Germanic languages there are even older examples of such phenomena (e.g., Light 2010).

The use of the expletive had become widespread in Icelandic by the 19th century, as in the text in (26), which dates from 1837.

- (26) ...snjóaði í Kantónarborg (Kanton)í fyrsta sinn í næstliðin 80 ár;  
 snowed in Canton in first time in previous eighty years  
 héldu landsmenn fyrst að **það** rigndi viðarull...  
 thought inhabitants first that it rained wood-wool  
 ‘It rained in Canton for the first time in 80 years. The inhabitants first thought that it rained wood wool...’ ([http://timarit.is/view\\_page\\_init.jsp?pageId=1993996](http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?pageId=1993996))

Given the fact that the *það* is not an argument, we will not discuss its distribution further in this paper.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.3 The quasi-argument *hann* in Icelandic and other Scandinavian languages

Whereas the emergence of the expletive *það* in Icelandic has been investigated previously (cf. Rögnvaldsson 2002, Viðarsson 2009), we do not know of any special diachronic study of the quasi-argument *hann*, which is homonymous with the third person masculine pronoun *hann* ‘he’. A search in the relevant databases (ROH, ÍT, IcePaHC and Tímarit.is) reveals that there are examples of *hann* in meteorological contexts already by the 17th century. In some of the early attestations, *hann* is plausibly analyzed as a referential pronoun; for example, in (27a) *hann* occurs with the verb *drífa* ‘snow’ and seems to refer to the noun *snjó* ‘snow’ in the preceding clause. This is supported by the fact that there is another example in the same document (27b) where the verb *drífa* takes the noun *snjó* (in accusative case).

- (27) a. ... **snjó** kom anno 1581, eptir það minnsta grasár; **hann** dreif  
 snow came in-year 1581 after that smallest grass-year he snowed  
 allan góu þrælinn.  
 all Góa’s the-slave.ACC  
 ‘Snow came in the year 1581, after that very little grass; it snowed constantly the last day of the month Góa.’
- b. Þá **dreif** **snjó** þann dag svo mikinn...  
 then snowed snow.ACC that day so much  
 ‘Then it snowed so much that day...’
- (ROH, Safn til sögu Íslands I-IV) (17th century)

Already by the 17th and the 18th centuries *hann* is attested with no apparent antecedent with the verbs *blása* ‘blow’ (28a) and *hvessa* ‘get windy’ (28b). However, given that these verbs are known to occur with a masculine NP, e.g., *vindur* ‘wind’, the element *hann* might be regarded as a referential pronoun.

- (28) a. Þorra dægur þykja löng, / þegar **hann** blæs á norðan.  
 Þorri.GEN days seem long when he blows from north  
 ‘The days of the month Þorri seem long, when the wind blows from the north.’
- (ROH, Hrólfs rímur kraka) (late 17th c., early 18th c.)

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<sup>3</sup> It may be mentioned that in recent years there are indications that the distribution (and therefore also the argument status) of *það* might be changing. In (i) an apparently non-referential *það* occurs to the right of the verb *rigna* ‘rain’ (here in the subjunctive), which deviates from the standard use. Such examples are, however, very rare.

- (i) Rigni það, rigni það bara.  
 rain it, rain it just  
 ‘May it rain, may it rain!’ ([http://timarit.is/view\\_page\\_init.jsp?pageId=4563729](http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?pageId=4563729))

- b. **Hann** er að hvessa.  
 he is to get-windy.INF  
 ‘It’s getting windy.’ (ROH, Sigurður Pétursson 1950:77) (1798)

In the late 19th-century texts given in (29) *hann* is found with *snjóa* ‘snow’ (29a) and *rigna* ‘rain’ (29b) which never occurred with a masculine NP. In these cases *hann* has clearly been reanalyzed as a non-referential argument.

- (29) a. **hann** snjóaði hjer mest síðari part dags...  
 he snowed here most latter part day.GEN  
 ‘It snowed the most here during the latter part of the day...’  
 ([http://timarit.is/view\\_page\\_init.jsp?issId=273382](http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=273382))
- b. Þetta er ljóta illviðrið – **hann** rignir allt af jafnt og þjett!  
 this is ugly the-bad-weather he rains always evenly and tightly  
 ‘This is shitty weather. It rains constantly.’  
 ([http://timarit.is/view\\_page\\_init.jsp?issId=273816&pageId=3942300](http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?issId=273816&pageId=3942300))

Interestingly, there is a time span of about two hundred years between the oldest examples in our data collection of *hann* preceding a finite verb (28a) and *hann* following a finite verb (30). The inversion here involves the verb *rigna* in a conditional clause (without the complementizer *ef* ‘if’); significantly, with that verb *hann* is clearly a quasi-argument.

- (30) ...sama er að segja, rigni hann...  
 same is to say rains he  
 ‘...the same applies when it rains...’  
 ([http://timarit.is/view\\_page\\_init.jsp?pageId=2021816](http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?pageId=2021816)) (1848)

Weather-*hann* is not only found in Icelandic; a similar phenomenon also exists in other Scandinavian languages, Faroese and West-Norwegian, Swedish and Jutlandic dialects (cf. Bandle 1973). The example in (31) is from Faroese (Thráinsson et al. 2012:287-9).

- (31) **Hann** kavar.  
 he snows  
 ‘It snows.’

As in Icelandic, *hann* in Faroese occurs in inversion, e.g., when a phrase like *i dag* ‘today’ is topicalized (32) (Thráinsson et al. 2012:287–9).

- (32) a. **Hann** er høgur í dag.  
 he is high today  
 ‘The wind blows from the north today.’
- b. Í dag er **hann** høgur.  
 today is he high  
 ‘Today the wind blows from the north.’

In West-Norwegian dialects the distribution is the same, and *hann* occurs both in clauses with a neutral word order and in inversion, see (33) (Helge Sandøy, p.c.):

- (33) a. **Hann** går seg på sør no.  
           he goes self on south now  
           ‘The wind is turning to the south now.’  
       b. No begynner **han** å tjukne til i vest.  
           now begins he to thicken.INF to in west  
           ‘Now it’s getting overcast in the west.’

Furthermore, it may be mentioned that weather-*hann* can occur in dative case following a preposition in Norwegian dialects, as in (34). This is reminiscent of the expression *það slítur úr honum* ‘there are scattered drops (lit. it tears from him)’ in Icelandic (35):

- (34) Det kom ikkje dropen utor **honum** i går.  
       it came not the-drop out-of him yesterday  
       ‘It didn’t rain a drop yesterday.’

- (35) Himinn er lágur og blakkur, og öðru hverju slítur úr  
       the-sky is low and dark and now-and-then tears from  
       **honum** hret.  
       him.DAT cold-spell

‘The sky is overcast and dark and every now and then there is scattered rain.’

([http://timarit.is/view\\_page\\_init.jsp?pageId=5968285](http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?pageId=5968285))

From the example in (35) it appears that the dative form *honum* is a real pronoun referring to the noun *himinn* ‘sky’ in the preceding clause. On the other hand, it is unclear what weather-*hann* in the other Icelandic (29–30), the Faroese (31–32) and Norwegian (33) examples refers to.

Earlier scholarship often assumed that weather-*hann* was a personal pronoun. Thus, Kopperstad (1920), for example, imagined that *hann* had a general reference to ‘sky’ (*himinn*) and ‘air temperature’ (*lofthiti*), or even to pagan gods like Njörðr. Although such ideas nowadays appear to have been discarded (cf. already Olsen 1920), the idea that weather-*hann* is a personal pronoun can still be found, notably in Barðdal (2015b:398), Thráinsson (2005:339) and Tráinsson et al. (2012:287-288). In both of the latter works the fact that *hann* cannot be omitted in Icelandic (36) and Faroese (37) is used to support a pronominal analysis of weather-*hann* in these languages.

- (36) \*Í gær var kaldur.  
       yesterday was cold.MASC

- (37) \*Í dag er høgur.  
       today is high.MASC

The analysis of *hann* as a personal pronoun in the modern languages is not convincing in our view. By the same argument it would, for example, be possible to claim that the quasi-argument *it* in English is referential, just because it cannot be omitted (*it rains* vs. *\*rains*).

As already stated, we believe that weather-*hann* was originally a referential pronoun and first emerged with verbs which could occur with a masculine noun, e.g., *vindur* ‘wind’ and *snjór* ‘snow’ (cf. Bandle 1973:47-48); later on this pronoun was reanalyzed as a non-referential quasi-argument. This assumption is supported by the oldest attestation in Icelandic of *hann* in weather clauses, given in (27a) and (28), where *hann* appears with verbs that are known to occur with a masculine noun. The use of weather-*hann* then spread to other weather verbs which did not occur with a masculine NP. In this way expressions like *hann rignir* ‘(lit.) he rains’, *hann snjóar* ‘(lit.) he snows’, *hann frystir* ‘(lit.) he freezes’ emerged. A further fact suggesting that *hann* is really a quasi-argument and not a personal pronoun is that sometimes speakers express uncertainty as to what it refers to, as seen in (38), where the person writing the text asks directly what the referent of *hann* is.

- (38) ..loksins héltst “hann” (himinn?? Hver er þessi hann??) nógu þurr...  
 finally remained he (the-sky) who is this he enough dry  
 ‘Finally “he” (the sky?? Who is this *he*??) stayed dry enough...’  
 ([http://oskimon.com/2003\\_07\\_01\\_gamalt.html](http://oskimon.com/2003_07_01_gamalt.html))

Thus, although weather-*hann* is a quasi-argument in Modern Icelandic, there are good reasons to believe that it originated as a referential pronoun.

#### 4 The syntactic position of weather verbs

As is well known, Icelandic has been a strict V2 language since its earliest attestation, with the finite verb obligatorily occurring in second position after the first constituent in both main and embedded clauses (e.g., Eythórsson 1995). A significant variation on this major theme is V1, whereby the finite verb occurs in initial position, in particular in certain syntactically and pragmatically conditioned contexts in declarative main clauses. A common subtype of V1 is the so-called Narrative Inversion (39), which, as its name implies, is found in narrative contexts in both Old and Modern Icelandic (cf. Thráinsson 1986, Sigurðsson 1990, 1994 [1983]).

- (39) Komu þeir þá að helli einum.  
 came they then to cave certain  
 ‘Then they came to a certain cave.’

Weather verbs, however, are very uncommon in clause-initial position in Old Icelandic. In our sources we have only found four such examples in main clauses (two of which in poetry) and one in an embedded clause. The example in (40), which is from a poem, is the only one of a single weather verb in clause-initial position in a main clause in Old Icelandic.



- (40) ...rignir mest, at regni / røkk, áðr heimrinn søkkvisk.  
 rains most at rain gets-dark before the-world sinks  
 ‘...it rains excessively, it gets dark with rain, before the world goes down.’  
 (ÍT, Bergbúa þáttur, Hallmundarkviða 6)

In the following examples a finite verb occurs initially in a main clause, with the NP following the verb. In (41) the NP *veðrit* ‘the weather’ is presumably accusative (based on our knowledge of later Icelandic), whereas *blóði* ‘blood’ in (42) is clearly dative. Assuming that the NPs are subjects, these clauses would seem to instantiate Narrative Inversion. The example in (40), on the other hand, only contains a single verb and therefore does not involve an inversion.

- (41) ok stóð Haraldr á búlkabrún ok skipaði land.  
 and stood Haraldr on freight-edge and ordered land  
Hvessti þá svá **veðrit**...  
 got-windy then so the-weather  
 ‘...and stood on the edge of the freight and ordered (his men to the) land. Then it got so windy...’ (ONP, Stu<sup>II</sup>R11127<sup>x</sup> 118<sup>25</sup>)

- (42) ...rignir **blóði**...  
 rains blood.DAT  
 ‘...it rains blood...’ (ÍT, Brennu-Njáls saga, ch. 157 (Darraðarljóð 1))

Narrative Inversion with weather verbs is also very rare in Modern Icelandic. The text in (43) contains the verb *rigna* ‘rain’ in clause-initial position in a narrative context, resembling Narrative Inversion, although there is no overt subject present in the clause which the verb could invert with.

- (43) Íþróttahátíð USVS var haldin síðasta laugardag....  
 sports-festival USVS was held last Saturday  
 Veðurguðirnir voru ekki með okur í liði. Rignði allan tímann...  
 the-weather-gods were not with us in team rained all the-time  
 ‘The USVS sports event was held last Saturday... The weather gods were not on our side. It rained the whole time...’ (Fréttabréf U.M.F. Ármanns 2013(8):1)

Moreover, weather verbs appear clause-initially in Modern Icelandic in *yes/no*-questions (44) and newspaper headlines (45). Again, given the absence of an overt subject, there is no inversion involved.

- (44) Rignir á Mars og er eitthvað vatn þar?  
 rains on Mars and is some water there  
 ‘Does it rain on Mars and is there any water there?’  
 (<http://www.visindavefur.is/svar.php?id=65115>)

- (45) Hvessir og snjóar norðantil á landinu.  
 get-windy and snows northern-part on the-land  
 ‘It gets windy and snows in the northern part of the country.’  
 (<http://www.ruv.is/frett/hvessir-og-snjoar-nordantil-a-landinu>)

In embedded clauses in Old Icelandic a single verb regularly occurs directly after the complementizer, as in the case of *birta* ‘brighten’ in (46).

- (46) Þeir fara, þar til at birti.  
 they go until that brightens  
 ‘They keep going until dawn.’ (ÍT, Örvar-Odds saga, ch. 5)

In Modern Icelandic such position of weather verbs is possible in embedded clauses, as in (47a), but the element *það* can also be inserted, as shown in (47b).

- (47) a. ...þá horfði hann áteiknimyndir [sic] með Afa þangað til að birti.  
 then watched he on-cartoons with grand-dad until that brightened  
 ‘...then he watched cartoons with Grandad until dawn.’  
 (<http://www.svalaogmar.blogspot.be/>)
- b. ...þangað til að **það** birti.  
 until it brightened  
 ‘...until dawn.’ (<http://www.grindavik.is/v/120>)

Instead of placing a weather verb in initial position in a declarative clause, usually some other word or phrase is placed in front of it, either by topicalization, as in (48), or by Stylistic Fronting, as in (49). These examples are from Old Icelandic, but the same holds of Modern Icelandic, although there the filler *það* is of course also a possibility in initial position.

- (48) **Þá** lýsti, er þeir fóru frá haugnum.  
 Then brightened when they went from the-mound...  
 ‘It dawned when they left the mound.’ (ÍT, Örvar-Odds saga, ch. 5)
- (49) Bað Elía, að **eigi** rigndi á jörðina.....  
 asked Eliah that not rained on the-earth  
 ‘Elijah asked that it shouldn’t rain on the earth...’ (ÍT, Ísl. hómilíubók. Fornar stólræður)

In summary, the examples we have discussed above show that weather verbs occur very rarely clause-initially in Old and Modern Icelandic. When they do occur in initial position, the placement seems to be conditioned by specific syntactic and pragmatic factors.

## 5 Arguments with weather verbs and their subject properties

### 5.1 Introduction

In the preceding sections it was shown that the weather verbs in Icelandic can take an overt argument. The results from sections 2 and 3 are summarized in Table 4. If a verb does not occur in the data we collected, it is placed within brackets in the table.

Table 4. Weather verbs in Old and Modern Icelandic taking an NP (nominative, accusative, or dative)

		OLD ICELANDIC					
		NOM	ACC	DAT			
precipitation	<i>drífa</i> 'snow'	x	x	x	phase change	<i>frysta</i> 'freeze'	x
	<i>fenna</i> 'snow'		x			<i>hlána</i> 'thaw'	x
	<i>rigna</i> 'rain'	x		x		<i>(hlýna)</i> 'get warm'	
	<i>snjóa</i> 'snow'					<i>kólna</i> 'get cold'	x
						<i>þiðna</i> 'thaw, melt'	x
wind	<i>blása</i> 'blow'	x	x		brightness	<i>birta</i> 'brighten'	x
	<i>hvessa</i> 'get windy'		x			<i>dimma</i> 'get dark'	x
	<i>lygna</i> 'abate (of wind)'		x			<i>lýsa</i> 'brighten'	x
	<i>lægja</i> 'abate (of wind)'		x			<i>myrkva</i> 'get dark'	x
						<i>rökkva</i> 'get dark'	
					<i>(skyggja)</i> 'get dark'		
		MODERN ICELANDIC					
		NOM	ACC	DAT			
precipitation	<i>drífa</i> 'snow'	x	x		phase change	<i>frysta</i> 'freeze'	
	<i>fenna</i> 'snow'		x			<i>hlána</i> 'thaw'	x
	<i>rigna</i> 'rain'	x		x		<i>hlýna</i> 'get warm'	x
	<i>snjóa</i> 'snow'			x		<i>kólna</i> 'get cold'	x
						<i>þiðna</i> 'thaw, melt'	x
wind	<i>blása</i> 'blow'	x	x		brightness	<i>birta</i> 'brighten'	x x
	<i>hvessa</i> 'get windy'	x	x			<i>dimma</i> 'get dark'	x x
	<i>lygna</i> 'abate (of wind)'	x	x			<i>lýsa</i> 'brighten'	x
	<i>lægja</i> 'abate (of wind)'	x	x			<i>myrkva</i> 'get dark'	
						<i>rökkva</i> 'get dark'	x
					<i>skyggja</i> 'get dark'	x	

In this section we consider in more detail NPs with weather verbs, their case marking and subject properties (cf., e.g., Jónsson 1996:112 ff., Thráinsson 2005, 2007).-Many subject tests are such that it is difficult to apply them to arguments of weather verbs, due to the semantic peculiarities of these verbs. Nevertheless, we think that a few such tests can be applied in

order to demonstrate the subject properties of the relevant arguments. Before we discuss the NPs that occur with weather verbs, we first briefly consider the status of possible covert arguments with these verbs.

## 5.2 Covert (quasi-) arguments

In the absence of any overt argument with a particular verb it is understandably difficult to apply subject tests. Yet, we propose that in particular two such tests may show that single verbs are not devoid of arguments, and, moreover, that the unexpressed phrase occurring with them is a subject. These tests are:

- (i) Control clauses
- (ii) Conjunction Reduction

Given that subjects must be omitted in control clauses, it may be assumed that verbs occurring in such clauses do in fact have a subject. As is well known, Chomsky (1981:323–325) used control clauses such as (50) to show that the element (“expletive”) *it* in English must be a subject (i.e., a quasi-argument since it is non-referential).

(50) It sometimes rains after \_\_\_ **snowing**.

Turning to Modern Icelandic, the example in (51) shows that *rigna* ‘rain’ can occur in a control infinitive. By the same reasoning as presented in connection with (50), this means that there is a missing subject in this clause, i.e., a quasi-argument.

(51) Þennan dag hafði hvesst án þess að \_\_\_ hafa **rignt**.  
 this day had got-windy without to PRO.0 have.INF rained  
 ‘On this day it had got windy without having rained.’

For comparison, the example in (52) contains the verb *syngja* ‘sing’ which takes a nominative subject which is omitted in a control infinitive:

(52) Hún hafði dansað án þess að \_\_\_ hafa **sungið**.  
 she had danced without to PRO.NOM have.INF sung  
 ‘She had danced without also having sung.’

Conjunction Reduction in second conjuncts also indicates that there is an unexpressed quasi-argument with weather verbs, as in example (53). Admittedly, however, it is difficult to establish with certainty whether two clauses or two verbs are being conjoined here, and hence the matter is uncertain.

(53) Á þessum árstíma **rignir** oft og \_\_\_ **snjóar** jafnvel meira.  
 on this season rains often and 0 snows even more  
 ‘During this time of year it often rains and it snows even more.’

### 5.3 Overt arguments with weather verbs in Modern Icelandic

As stated above, a few tests can be applied to the arguments of weather verbs in Modern Icelandic in order to demonstrate their subject properties. The subject tests which are of particular interest in the context of weather verbs with overt NPs include the following:

- (i) Position of the argument in main and embedded clauses
- (ii) Position of the argument in raising infinitives
- (iii) The Definiteness Effect (DE) in raising infinitives
- (iv) Constraints on extraction of an argument out of an embedded clause

Examples of these subject tests are given below. First, the position of the argument in between a finite auxiliary like *hafa* ‘have’ and a main verb is generally considered a valid subject test in Icelandic (54a). The same holds of clauses containing aspectual auxiliaries like *fara* ‘begin’ (54b).

- (54) a. Um morguninn *hafði vindinn lægt.*  
 in the-morning had the-wind.ACC abated  
 ‘In the morning the wind had abated.’
- b. Í gær *fór vindinn að lægja.*  
 in yesterday began the-wind.ACC to abate.INF  
 ‘Yesterday the wind began to abate.’

On the other hand, objects cannot occur in this position, as exemplified with *hafa* in (55b-c).

- (55) a. Um morguninn *hafði Guðmundur lesið bókina.*  
 in the-morning had Guðmundur.NOM read the-book.ACC  
 ‘In the morning Guðmundur had read the book.’
- b. \*Um morguninn *hafði bókina lesið Guðmundur.*  
 in the-morning had the-book.ACC read Guðmundur.NOM
- c. \*Um morguninn *hafði Guðmundur bókina lesið.*  
 in the-morning had Guðmundur.NOM the-book.ACC read

Second, the position of the argument in infinitive clauses embedded under raising verbs like *telja* ‘consider’ is also a subject property. In this case an argument of a weather verb is “raised” to the object position of the verb in the matrix clause, as in the example in (56a). In corresponding passive clauses the argument occurs in a subject position, as in (56b). Both instances support the analysis of the NP with verbs like *lægja* as a subject.

- (56) a. Hann taldi *vindinn ekki hafa lægt.*  
 he considered the-wind.ACC not have.INF abated  
 ‘He didn’t think the wind had abated.’
- b. *Vindinn* var ekki talið *hafa lægt.*  
 the-wind.ACC was not considered have.INF abated  
 ‘The wind was not thought to have abated.’

It is less felicitous, in our judgment, to place the argument to the right of the main verb, as indicated in (57).

- (57) ??Hann taldi ekki hafa lægt vindinn.  
 he considered not have abated the-wind.ACC

For comparison, consider the examples in (58), involving the verb *leiðast* ‘be bored’ which takes a dative subject and an optional nominative object. These examples show that only subjects and not objects are “raised” to the object position of the verb in the matrix clause, and that subjects cannot be placed to the right of the main verbs in such structures (58b).

- (58) a. Hann taldi **Guðmundi** ekki hafa leiðst (myndin).  
 he considered Guðmundur.DAT not have bored the-film.NOM  
 ‘He thought that Guðmundur had not been bored (by the movie).’  
 b. \*Hann taldi (myndin) ekki hafa leiðst **Guðmundi**.  
 he considered the-film.NOM not have bored Guðmundur.DAT  
 c. \*Hann taldi (myndin) ekki hafa **Guðmundi** leiðst.  
 he considered the-film.NOM not have Guðmundur.DAT bored

Third, the Definiteness Effect (DE) only applies to subjects – and not objects – and is therefore a subject property. As mentioned in section 2.3.3 above, the verb *rigna* ‘rain’ can take an NP in dative case. In (59) the verb and its dative NP (*sprengjum/sprengjunum* ‘bombs’/‘the bombs’) occur in an infinitive clause embedded under *láta* ‘let’. Whereas both definite and indefinite NPs can precede the infinitive (59a), only indefinite NPs can follow the verb; definite forms are strongly dispreferred in this position, if not excluded altogether (59b).

- (59) a. Þeir létu **sprengj-um/sprengjunum** rigna í Sýr-landi.  
 they let bombs.DAT/the-bombs.DAT rain.INF in Syria  
 ‘They let bombs/the bombs rain in Syria.’  
 b. Þeir létu rigna **sprengjum/??sprengj-unum** í Sýr-landi.  
 they let rain.INF bombs.DAT/the-bombs.DAT in Syria  
 ‘They let bombs/??the bombs rain in Syria.’

The infelicity of the definite form *sprengj-unum* ‘the bombs (dat.)’ to the right of the verb in (59b) is due to the DE, which suggests that the NP is a subject. The DE also applies to nominative subjects, as with the verb *falla* ‘fall’ in (60); the NP shows up as accusative due to the fact that it is embedded under *láta* in the matrix clause.

- (60) a. Hann lét **skikkju/skikkjuna** falla um herðar sér.  
 he let cloak.DAT/the-cloak.DAT fall around shoulders self  
 ‘He threw a cloak/the cloak around his shoulders.’  
 b. Hann lét falla **skikkju/??skikkjuna** um herðar sér.  
 he let fall cloak-DAT/the-cloak.DAT around shoulders self  
 ‘He threw a cloak/??the cloak around his shoulders.’

The fourth and final subject property to be mentioned in this connection involves an argument which does not block the extraction of an adverb out of an embedded clause, as in (61) and (62a). On the other hand, such extraction is not possible with topicalized objects, as seen in (62b) (cf. Jónsson 1996:112, 115).

(61) Hvenær sagði María [að **vindinn** hefði lægt \_\_ ]?  
 when said Mary that the-wind.ACC had abated  
 ‘When did Mary say that the wind had abated?’

(62) a. Hvenær sagði María [að **Jóni** hefði leiðst \_\_ ]?  
 when said Mary that John.DAT had bored  
 ‘When did Mary say that John was bored?’

b. \*Hvenær sagði María [að **þessi bók** hefði Jóni líkað \_\_ ]?  
 when said Mary that this.NOM book.NOM had John.DAT liked

As shown earlier, the arguments of weather verbs pass the above subject tests. Yet, there are cases where they do not behave like subjects according to the usual definition, especially regarding the DE (Jónsson 1996:111). We will now briefly discuss such violations of the DE.

Normally, a definite NP is not possible as an associate of the filler *það*, neither when it precedes the main verb (63a) nor when it follows it (63b).

(63) a. \*Það hafði **maðurinn** komið.  
 it had the-man.NOM come  
 b. \*Það hafði komið **maðurinn**.  
 it had come the-man.NOM

Corresponding clauses with weather verbs show a different behavior regarding DE violations. A definite NP is blocked as an associate when preceding a main verb, as in (64a), but allowed when following a main verb, as in (64b).<sup>4</sup>

(64) a. \*Það hafði **vindinn** lægt.  
 it had the-wind.ACC abated  
 b. Það hafði lægt **vindinn**.  
 it had abated the-wind.ACC  
 ‘The wind had abated.’

<sup>4</sup> The pattern in (64) is reminiscent of the one in (i), mentioned by Thráinsson (2005:274–275) as an exception to the DE.

- (i) a. \*Það er **mjólkin** búin  
 it is the-milk.NOM gone  
 b. Það er búin **mjólkin**  
 it is gone the-milk.NOM  
 ‘We are out of milk.’

Furthermore, in main clauses with a topicalized phrase the DE does not apply when the NP precedes the main verb (65a), but only when the NP follows the verb (65b) (cf. Jónsson 1996:190).

- (65) a. Um morguninn hafði **maðurinn** komið.  
           in the-morning had the-man.NOM come  
           ‘In the morning the man had come.’  
       b. \*Um morguninn hafði komið **maðurinn**.  
           in the-morning had come the-man.NOM

In contrast to (65), a definite NP can follow a weather verb in clauses with a topicalized phrase, both when the NP is in nominative (66b) and in oblique case (67b).

- (66) a. Um morguninn hafði **loftið** hlýnað.  
           in the-morning had the-air.NOM gotten-warm  
           ‘In the morning the air had got warm.’  
       b. Um morguninn hafði hlýnað **loftið**.  
           in the-morning had gotten-warm the-air.NOM  
           ‘In the morning the air had got warm.’
- (67) a. Um morguninn hafði **vindinn** lægt.  
           in the-morning had the-wind.ACC abated  
           ‘In the morning the wind had abated.’  
       b. Um morguninn hafði lægt **vindinn**.  
           in the-morning had abated the-wind.ACC  
           ‘In the morning the wind had abated.’

From the facts discussed in this section the following may be concluded: First, both nominative and oblique NPs with weather verbs show subject properties (cf. (i–iv) above). Secondly, the phrases sometimes violate the DE, which is unexpected in the case of a subject. In this respect weather verbs seem to behave like unaccusatives, where it is often assumed (starting with Perlmutter 1978) that the subject originates in object position. Some discussion of weather verbs on the basis of the Unaccusative Hypothesis can be found in the syntactic literature on other languages, e.g., French and English (Ruwet 1991, Paykin 2010 and Bleotu 2012). An examination of Icelandic weather verbs on the basis of this hypothesis reveals that a part of them can easily be subsumed under it, including the verbs *hlýna* ‘get warm’ and *kólna* ‘get cold’, which take a nominative subject, as well as *hvessa* ‘get windy’ and *lægja* ‘abate’, which originally take an oblique (accusative) subject. Verbs of this type have been termed anticausatives (Ottosson 2013, Sandal 2011, Barðdal 2015a, Cennamo, Eythórsson and Barðdal 2015); moreover, the latter two pattern with verbs like *reka* ‘drift’ which occur with a “stray” or “fate accusative” subject (Sigurðsson 2006, Thráinsson 2007:296, Schäfer 2008). These verbs are formed on the basis of ergative pairs, as discussed in section 6.3 below.



#### 5.4 Overt arguments with weather verbs in Old Icelandic

Having shown that that NP arguments with weather verbs are subjects in Modern Icelandic, we now propose that this also hold of Old Icelandic. Although it is admittedly much more difficult to find independent tests supporting a subject analysis for the earlier stage of the language, the following two tests can be mentioned:

- (i) The syntactic position of the argument
- (ii) Raising infinitives

As to first point, the Old Icelandic examples in (68b) and (69b) show that the NP follows the finite verb in clauses with an inversion, just as in Modern Icelandic.

- (68) a. ...köstuðu þá akkerum, til þess er **veður** lægði.  
 threw then anchors until weather.NOM abated  
 ‘... they cast anchor until the weather got calm.’ (ÍT, Egils saga)
- b. Þá lægði **storminn**...  
 then abated the-storm.ACC  
 ‘Then the storm abated...’ (ÍT, Helga kviða Hundingsbana II)

Moreover, in clauses involving the aspectual auxiliary *taka* ‘begin (lit. take)’, as in (69), the NP can occur between the auxiliary and the infinitive form of the main verb, which is a clear subject property. Although such examples are very few, their value cannot be dismissed.

- (69) a. **Veður** tók að þykkna...  
 weather.NOM begin to thicken.INF  
 ‘It began to get cloudy...’ (ÍT, Fóstbræðra saga, ch. 9)
- b. Þá tók **veðrið** að þykkna...  
 then began the-weather.NOM to thicken.INF  
 ‘Then it began to get cloudy...’ (ÍT, Fóstbræðra saga, ch. 3)

As to raising infinitives, we have seen in 5.3 that definite (but not indefinite) subjects are dispreferred postverbally in such structures in Modern Icelandic. The occurrence of the indefinite NP *blóði* ‘blood (DAT)’ following the verb *rigna* ‘rain’ in (70) is in accordance with this constraint. However, the example is inconclusive given that there is no matching attestation of an NP preceding *rigna*, which would be a decisive proof of subject raising.

- (70) Honum þótti rigna **blóði** í ljórana.  
 him.DAT thought rain.INF blood.DAT on the-windows  
 ‘It seemed to him that blood was raining on the windows.’ (ÍT, Sturlunga saga)

From this it can be seen that the evidence for the subject nature of NPs with weather verbs in Old Icelandic is very fragmental. Nevertheless, there is nothing in particular which directly speaks against a subject analysis of these NPs, and with regard to Modern Icelandic such an analysis is indeed plausible.

## 6 The origins of weather verbs

### 6.1 Introduction

As shown in the preceding sections, weather verbs are not devoid of arguments, but can in fact occur with both NP arguments and quasi-arguments. In this section we tackle the question why weather verbs can occur either with or without an NP argument, and why the case of the NP differs according to verb.

### 6.2 The expression of weather events

All utterances describing the weather can be regarded as expressing a particular weather event (cf. Eriksen, Kittilä and Kolehmainen 2010, 2012). Eriksen et al. (2010, 2012) propose a typological classification of the coding of weather events, discussing three different possibilities: First, a single verb can express the weather event (Predicate Type); secondly, the weather event can be expressed by a noun referring to the weather and a verb which is often semantically vague or has a general meaning (Argument Type); and third, both a noun and a verb can jointly express the weather event (Argument-Predicate Type). Eriksen et al. (2010, 2012) emphasize that the same language can make use of more than one type to describe weather events. We believe we have found examples from Icelandic of the first two types, shown in (71). The third type, however, is nonexistent in Icelandic, although examples involving precipitation in a metaphorical sense can be found, as mentioned in section 2.3.3 above; cf. Old Icelandic *rigna regni þegna Hávars* ‘to rain (the) rain (DAT) of Hávar’s thanes’, meaning that there is a battle’ (15b); this expression is shown in brackets in (71).

(71) Predicate Type: *rignir* ‘rains’

Argument Type: *regn fellur* ‘rain falls’/*gerir regn* ‘makes rain’

Argument-Predicate Type: (*rignir regni* ‘rains rain (DAT)’)

Since the aim of Eriksen et al. (2010, 2012) is mainly to give a typological overview of the coding of weather events, they do not specifically treat changes in weather verbs and their historical development. To be sure, they give examples from a few languages (Finnish, Swahili and Polish) where precipitation verbs are derived from verbs with a general meaning, such as ‘fall’ and ‘come’ (2010:31-37). On the basis of our study of weather verbs in Icelandic, however, we claim that not only can we show how these verbs developed, but we can also set forth a hypothesis on their emergence.

### 6.3 The three developmental paths of weather verbs

Many weather verbs are not confined to describing weather conditions but are also used in a more general context, e.g., verbs like *kólna* ‘get cold’, *hitna* ‘get warm’, *hvessa* ‘get windy (lit. sharpen)’ and *frysta* ‘freeze’. We assume that this use is more original than their use as weather verbs. In order for such verbs to describe weather conditions, they must have co-

occurred with a noun signaling a weather phenomenon (e.g., *veður* ‘weather’ or *vindur* ‘wind’) which would refer to the relevant weather event (cf. the Argument-Predicate Type in Eriksen et al. 2010, 2012). The verbs would then have further specified the meaning of the noun and its role in the weather event (e.g., *regn fellur* ‘rain falls’ or *vindur kólnar* ‘wind gets cold’). Finally, the verbs themselves could assume the coding of the weather event.

In (72) we illustrate our hypothesis on the historical origin of weather verbs. Again, there are three possibilities, which we term Path 1–3, exemplified with the verbs *rigna* ‘rain’, *kólna* ‘get cold’ and *hvessa* ‘get windy’.

(72) Path 1: [RAIN] *rignir*: *pro rignir* > 0 *rignir*

Path 2: NP.NOM *kólnar* > *pro kólnar* > 0 *kólnar*

Path 3: (NP.NOM *hvessir* NP.ACC) > NP.ACC *hvessir* > *pro hvessir* > 0 *hvessir*

Path 1 involves a verb which never had an overt argument (as far back in time as our sources go), but originally occurred with an unexpressed argument (*pro*) referring to an abstract concept (e.g., RAIN). In due course this *pro* was reanalyzed as a quasi-argument (indicated by 0). Since the verbs *rigna* and *snjóa* mostly occur without an NP, it is reasonable to assume that they came into being according to Path 1, i.e., that they occurred without an overt argument from the start and preserve this characteristic in the modern language. A diachronic investigation and a comparison with related languages supports this idea.

Icelandic *rigna* has cognates in closely related languages (Goth. *rignjan*, OE *rignan*, *rīnan*, OHG *reganōn* etc.), but it has proved difficult to connect it to roots outside Germanic (Magnússon 1989:761). Moreover, it is clear that in the earliest Germanic sources, Old Icelandic, Gothic and Old English, the use of the verb ‘rain’ both without an overt argument and with a dative NP are attested; as mentioned earlier, the dative can be traced back to an instrumental case. Interestingly, when a dative NP accompanies the verb ‘rain’, the expression is mostly non-literal or metaphorical, but in case of actual rain, only the single verb is used.

An important characteristic of verbs following Path 1 is that they are all formed from weather nouns, *rigna* ‘rain’ from *regn* ‘rain’, *snjóa* ‘snow’ from *snjór* ‘snow’, and other verbs not discussed here, e.g., *styrma* ‘get stormy’ from *stormur* ‘storm’ (cf. Magnússon 1989:761, 918, 982). This may suggest that although the verbs were from the earliest times without an overt NP, they referred to abstract concepts matching the nouns they were formed from (RAIN, SNOW, STORM etc.).

Path 2 involves a development from an intransitive verb taking a nominative NP subject to a weather verb without an overt argument. Verbs formed along Path 2 can be divided up into two classes. The first class comprises verbs derived from an adjective-by means of a *na*-suffix, e.g., *kólna* ‘get cold’ and *hlýna* ‘get warm’. These verbs are in fact anticausatives, alternating with transitive verbs such as *kæla* ‘make cold’ and *hlýja* ‘make warm’ (cf. Ottosson 2013, Cennamo et al. 2015). Furthermore, verbs of the type *kólna* and *hlýna* are never – neither in Old nor Modern Icelandic – found with another case than nominative.

The latter class comprises verbs which are not derived from adjectives, e.g., *blása* ‘blow’ and *drífa* ‘snow’. As weather verbs they occur with a nominative in Old Icelandic (73), but in Modern Icelandic they also occur with accusative (74), which is clearly a later development (see also 3.1.2 above).

- (73) a. ..sem á blási **fagur** **sunnanvindur**.  
 as on blows fair.NOM southern-wind.NOM  
 ‘...as a gentle southern wind is blowing.’ (ONP, Thom<sup>2</sup> 433<sup>8</sup>)
- b. Þá drífr **snær** ór öllum áttum.  
 then snows snow.NOM from all sides  
 ‘Then it snows from all sides.’ (ÍT, Snorra Edda, ch. 51)
- (74) a. **Vindinn** blés og bátnum velti um koll.  
 the-wind.ACC blew and the-boat.DAT turned on top  
 ‘It was windy and the boat capsized.’  
 (<https://www.hugi.is/ljod/greinar/81337/oldukoss/>)
- b. Afar mikinn **snjó** dreif niður...  
 very much snow.ACC snowed down  
 ‘It snowed very much...’ ([http://timarit.is/view\\_page\\_init.jsp?pageId=2216304](http://timarit.is/view_page_init.jsp?pageId=2216304))

Finally, according to Path 3, a transitive verb and an intransitive one first form an ergative pair (cf. Maling and Zaenen 1990, Thráinsson 2007:303), in which the subject case of the intransitive verb – i.e., the anticausative alternant (Sandal 2011, Barðdal 2015a, Cennamo et al. 2015) – corresponds to the object case of the transitive verb. The intransitive verb then changes into a weather verb without an overt argument (see further section 6.4).

Weather verbs which have emerged according to Path 3 do not only include weather descriptions but also exist in a general meaning. In many cases they are derived from adjectives. Thus, the verb *hvessa* ‘get windy (lit. sharpen)’ is derived from the adjective *hvass* ‘sharp’ and *lægja* ‘abate (lit. lower)’ from *lágur* ‘low’ (Magnússon 1989:393, 592). In (75a) we can see an intransitive use of *hvessa* as a weather verb, while comparable transitive use can be seen in (75b).

- (75) a. ...hvessti **veðrit**...  
 got-windy the-weather.ACC  
 ‘...it got windy...’ (ONP, BøglEirsp 450<sup>14</sup>)
- b. ...er Þórr hvessti **augun** á orminn.  
 when Þórr sharpened the-eyes.ACC.PL on the-worm  
 ‘... when Þór gave the worm a sharp look.’ (ÍT, Snorra Edda)

Thus, the weather verbs of the type discussed here, which take oblique subjects, result from the anticausative alternant of ergative pairs of the kind mentioned above (Sandal 2011, Barðdal 2015a, Cennamo et al. 2015).

#### 6.4 From overt to covert arguments

Given our hypothesis that some weather verbs (namely those following Paths 2 and 3) originally occurred with a visible argument, one may ask how and why these verbs “lost” their NPs. To answer this question two matters must be considered: first, *pro*-drop in Old Icelandic and secondly, the nature of the coding of weather events.

Old Icelandic was a *pro*-drop language where any argument, be it subject or object, could be left unexpressed given that its referent was retrievable from the context (Hjartardóttir 1993, Sigurðsson 1993, Kinn, Rusten and Walkden 2016). In (76) there is an example of the verb *lygna* ‘abate’ without an overt NP. It can be surmised that the verb occurs with an “empty” phrase referring to the noun *veður* ‘weather’ in the previous clause, which would be its antecedent. This could be regarded as a case of *pro*-drop (i.e., omission of the noun *veður* ‘weather’ in Conjunction Reduction) and not necessarily an example of a single weather verb.

- (76) *veður var á ok snæfall mikit ok \_\_lygnir um aptaninn.*  
 weather was on and snowfall much and abates on the-evening  
 ‘There was bad weather and lots of snow, but it got calm in the evening.’  
 (ONP, GíslFrg 42<sup>9</sup>)

As stated in section 2, there are also examples in Old Icelandic where a weather verb appears without an NP and any antecedent which an unexpressed argument could refer to. In (77) two examples of this kind involving the verbs *lýsa* and *birta*, both meaning ‘brighten’, are shown.

- (77) *Þá lýsti, er þeir fóru frá haugnum. Þeir fara, þar til at birti.*  
 then brightened when they went from the-mound they go until brightened  
 ‘It dawned when they left the mound. They carried on until it got light.’  
 (ÍT, Örvar-Odds saga, ch. 5.)

It can be assumed that *pro*-drop, i.e., an unexpressed referential pronoun, is an intermediate stage in the development from a verb with a general meaning, taking an overt NP, to a proper weather verb without an overt argument, as illustrated in (78). We assume that this holds of both nominative and oblique subject verbs.

- (78) NP V > *pro* V > 0 V

On the basis of the classification of Eriksen et al. (2010, 2012), discussed above, it can be suggested that (78) shows a change in the coding of weather events, i.e., from Argument-Predicate Type to Predicate Type. It is unclear whether such a change can happen except on the basis of *pro*-drop (i.e., the intermediate stage in (78)). Given the availability of *pro*-drop, the expression of the weather event can be reanalyzed in such a way that it is expressed with a single verb (taking a quasi-argument, i.e., the final stage in (78)) and not an NP and a verb.

The hypothetical development sketched in (78) predicts that in Modern Icelandic new weather verbs should not be able to emerge from ordinary verbs taking a subject NP, simply because extensive *pro*-drop is not an integral part of Modern Icelandic grammar. Considering for example a recent combination of a verb with a weather noun, *vind hreyfir* ‘wind (ACC) moves, i.e., it is windy’ (the oldest example with a dative is from 1909), it is clear that it is not possible to use the verb alone (*\*hreyfir*) to express the weather event. Since Modern Icelandic is not a *pro*-drop language in the strict sense, *vind hreyfir* is not supposed to be able to develop in such a way that the function of this collocation is replaced by a single verb.

However, although new weather verbs cannot be formed according to (78) above, it is still possible in Modern Icelandic to derive single weather verbs directly from a weather noun,

e.g., the verbs *slydda* ‘be sleeting’ and *gusta* ‘blow’ from the nouns *slydda* ‘sleet’ and *gustur* ‘gust of wind’, respectively. Presumably these verbs originate on the pattern of verbs like *rigna* ‘rain’, formed in accordance with Path 1.

## 6.5 Stability and change in the history of Icelandic weather verbs

Weather verbs have shown considerable stability from Old to Modern Icelandic. First, the lexical items themselves have for the most part remained identical throughout history. Secondly, the verbs could either occur with or without an overt NP in Old Icelandic and the same is true of the modern language. We have claimed (in section 6.4) that covert elements with weather verbs in Old Icelandic were of two types: a covert argument (*pro*) and a covert quasi-argument (i.e., a non-referential argument which emerged from a reanalysis of *pro*). In Modern Icelandic, on the other hand, there is only one type of a covert argument, i.e., a quasi-argument. In fact, the retention of the covert quasi-argument (i.e., the non-referential *pro*) in the modern language bears witness to the continuity in the development of Icelandic from the earliest times (cf. Sigurðsson 1993:278).

In section 3.3 the emergence of the quasi-argument *hann* with weather verbs was linked to the use of NPs with these verbs. An examination of this quasi-argument reveals that the oldest examples emerged in the 17th century, around the same time as *pro*-drop started disappearing. Thus, weather-*hann* can be regarded as the manifestation of the earlier *pro*. On our hypothesis, weather-*hann* was originally referential but was soon reanalyzed as a quasi-argument and spread to other weather verbs which had never occurred with a masculine NP. This reanalysis seems to have been completed by the mid-19th century since the earliest examples of *rigna* ‘rain’ and *snjóa* ‘snow’ with *hann* are attested from that time.

Figure 1 shows the structure and the development of phrases with weather verbs which came into being along Paths 2 and 3, using *hvessa* ‘get windy’ as an example.

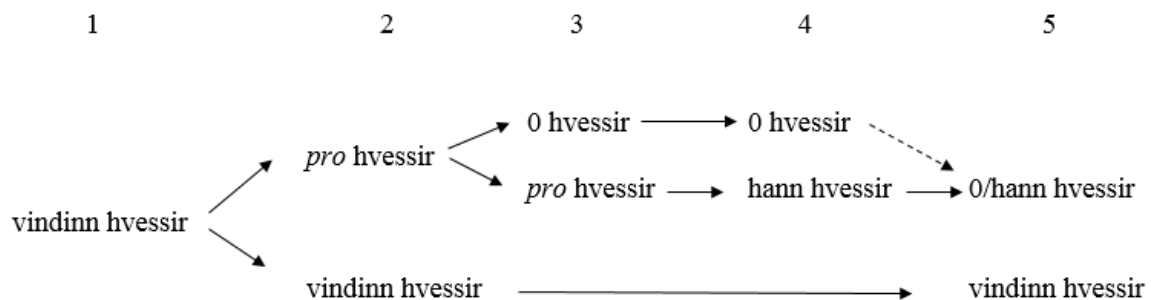


Figure 1. The development of arguments in Icelandic (Paths 2 and 3)

In Old Icelandic (stages 1–2 in Figure 1) the verb *hvessa* could, on the one hand, occur with an NP (*vindinn hvessir* ‘the wind (ACC) gets windy, i.e., it gets windy’) and, on the other hand, involve *pro*-drop (*pro hvessir*). On our analysis *pro* had the possibility of being reanalyzed as a covert quasi-argument (indicated by 0), presumably already in Old Icelandic (stage 3). When *pro*-drop lost ground in early Modern Icelandic, pronouns had to be visible in

most contexts. With verbs that could take a masculine NP the personal pronoun *hann* ‘he’ was used (stage 4). The pronoun was soon reanalyzed as a quasi-argument and spread to other weather verbs, and even further to verbs referring to parts of day (e.g., *hann kvöldar* ‘it (lit. ‘he’) becomes evening’). In Modern Icelandic there is thus a variation between overt and covert quasi-argument (weather-*hann* vs. 0), and in addition weather verbs of this type can occur with an NP (*vindinn hvessir*) (stage 5).

As stated above, Figure 1 only shows the development of verbs which have emerged along Paths 2 and 3, i.e. verbs which originally occurred with an NP and were then reanalyzed as weather verbs. Verbs which are formed along Path 1 in fact evolve in a similar way, shown in Figure 2, with the verb *rigna* ‘rain’ as an example.

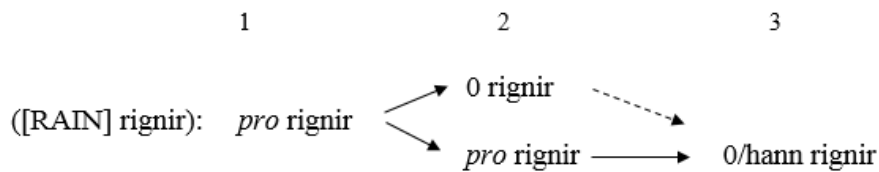


Figure 2. The development arguments in Icelandic (Path 1)

Instead of originally having an overt NP, we assume that weather verbs of this type refer to an abstract concept, e.g., RAIN. Otherwise the development of these verbs follows a similar path to that of the verbs formed according to Paths 2 and 3.

It is important to bear in mind that the reanalysis resulting in weather-*hann* is, as it were, a recurrence of the tendency, already found in Old Icelandic, to reanalyze a referential pronoun as a quasi-argument. In Old Icelandic this was a covert operation, but in Modern Icelandic the pronoun must be overt while the quasi-arguments do not have to be visible. The existence of a covert quasi-argument in Modern Icelandic is synchronically an anomaly, which is only comprehensible on the assumption that it is a residue from Old Icelandic (Sigurðsson 1993).

## 7 Conclusion

Contrary to what has been claimed, weather verbs in Icelandic do not only occur without an overt argument, but they can also take a full NP, either in nominative, accusative or dative case. As the preceding discussion indicates, such verbs can be classified according to their meaning, their syntactic and morphosyntactic properties, and their historical origin.

The different origins of weather verbs explain to a large degree the use of cases with these verbs. Weather verbs with a nominative can be traced back to general verbs with a nominative subject (e.g., *kólna* ‘get cold’), while weather verbs with accusative are formed as anticausative alternants of transitive verbs (*hvessa* ‘get windy’). Dative NPs with *rigna* ‘rain’ and *snjóa* ‘snow’ have a counterpart in Old Germanic languages, where there is evidence that the dative replaced an earlier instrumental case. It is important to keep in mind that the

occurrence of weather verbs with a full NP has continued to exist from Old to Modern Icelandic.

In Modern Icelandic subject tests can be applied to a certain extent to establish the subjecthood of the NP with weather verbs. In Old Icelandic it is clear that nominative NPs with such verbs are subjects, whereas the subject status of oblique NPs is not as conclusive.

We have argued that with a number of weather verbs there was a development from an intransitive taking either nominative or oblique subject NP to weather verbs without an overt argument. This development was triggered by the availability of *pro*-drop in Old Icelandic. By assumption, *pro* could be reanalyzed as a covert quasi-argument and, as a consequence, the coding of the weather event shifted from an Argument-Predicate Type to a Predicate Type (following the classification in Eriksen et al. 2010, 2012). Apparently, the covert pronoun (*pro*) and the covert quasi-argument coexisted for some time, until referential *pro* became severely restricted in early Modern Icelandic. This led to the emergence of weather-*hann*, which was originally a pronoun but was subsequently reanalyzed as an overt quasi-argument. The reanalysis gave rise to a competition between structures with overt and covert quasi-arguments (*í gær rigndi hann* vs. *í gær rigndi 0*). It is remarkable that weather-*hann* never gained ground in Icelandic, being limited to certain registers or dialects, but the unexpressed quasi-argument is the norm. This fact is unexpected given that Modern Icelandic is not a language with extensive *pro*-drop, but it is comprehensible in light of the general diachronic stability of Icelandic grammar.

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