The New Impersonal/Passive in Icelandic: Development in Real time and Predictions for the Future

Höskuldur Thráinsson
University of Iceland
hoski@hi.is
https://uni.hi.is/hoski/
Outline of the talk

• **Introduction:** What is the “The New (Impersonal) Passive” like?

• **Overview of ideas about the origin (and nature) of the NIP**
  - foreign influence
  - related to/reinterpreted from impersonal/expletive *active* constructions
  - related to/reinterpreted from impersonal/expletive *passive* constructions

• **Brief review of previous research on the diffusion of the NIP**
  - Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir and Joan Maling
  - Finnur Friðriksson
  - IceDiaSyn

• **Development in real time and predictions for the future**
  - RAUN
  - Anton Karl Ingason, Legate and Yang

• **Concluding remarks**
What is „The New (Impersonal) Passive (NIP) like?

The Canonical Passive (CanP) in Icelandic:

(1) a. Löggurnar handtóku anarkistana.
    the-cops(N.pl.) arrested(pl.) the-anarchist s(A.m.pl.)

b. Anarkistarnir voru handteknir (af lögggunum) (CanP A)
    the-anarchists (N.m.pl.) were(pl.) arrested(m.pl.) (by the cops)

Standard (relatively informal) description of CanP A:
1. patient undergoes NP-movement to subject position
2. case conversion: Acc-to-Nom, and (hence)
3. Nom. subject triggers agreement of finite aux. and participle

(2) a. Löggurnar slepptu anarkistunum.
    the-cops(N.pl.) released(pl.) the-anarchists(D.m.pl.)

b. Anarkistunum var sleppt (af lögggunum) (CanP B)
    the-anarchists(D.m.pl.) was(sg.) released(n.sg.) (by the cops)

Standard (relatively informal) description of CanP B:
1. patient undergoes NP-movement to subject position
2. no case conversion (Dat and Gen preserved) and (hence)
3. no agreement
What is the NIP like, 2?

The Expletive Canonical Passive A (ExplCanP A):

(a) a. það voru einhverjir anarkistar handteknir. (ExplCanP A1)
   there were(pl.) some anarchists(N.m.pl.) arrested(m.pl.)

b. það voru handteknir einhverjir anarkistar. (ExplCanP A2)
   there were(pl.) arrested(m.pl.) some anarchists(N.m.pl.)

c. *það voru anarkistarnir handteknir. (cf. a)
   there were(pl.) the-anarchists(N.m.pl.def.) arrested(m.pl.)

d. ?*það voru handteknir anarkistarnir. (cf. b)
   there were(pl.) arrested(m.pl.) the-anarchists(N.m.pl.def.)

Standard (relatively informal) description of ExplCanP A:

1. patient can undergo short NP-movement (cf. a) but does not have to (cf. b).
2. case conversion Acc-to-Nom and (hence)
3. agreement of the finite aux. and the participle (as in CanP A)
4. Definiteness Effect (cf. c and d, typical of expletive constructions)
What is the NIP like, 3?

The Expletive Canonical Passive B (ExplCanP B):

(1) a. það var einhverjum anarkistum sleppt. (ExplCanP B1)
   there was(sg.) some anarchists(D.m.pl.) released(n.sg.)

b. það var sleppt einhverjum anarkistum. (ExplCanP B2)
   there was(sg.) released(n.sg.) some anarchists(D.m.pl.)

c. *það var anarkistunum sleppt. (cf. a)
   there was(sg.) the-anarchists(D.m.pl.def.) released(n.sg.)

d. ?*það var sleppt anarkistunum. (cf. b)
   there was(sg.) released(n.sg.) the-anarchists(N.m.pl.def.)

Standard (relatively informal) description of ExplCanP B:

1. patient can undergo short NP-movement (cf. a) but does not have to (cf. b).
2. **no case conversion** and (hence)
3. **no agreement**
4. Definiteness Effect (cf. c and d)
What is the NIP like, 4?

The NIP corresponding to ExplCanP A:

(1) a. það var handtekið einhverja anarkista. (NIP A)  
there was arrested(n.sg.) some anarchists(A.m.pl.)
b. það var handtekið anarkistana. (NIP A)  
there was arrested(n.sg.) the-anarchists(A.m.pl.def.)
c. *það var anarkistana handtekið.  
there was the-anarchists(A.m.pl.def.) arrested(n.sg.)

Standard (relatively informal) description of NIP A (red = different from ExplCanP A):

1. no case conversion (Acc-to-Nom) and (hence)
2. no agreement of the finite aux. nor the participle
3. no Definiteness Effect (cf. b)
4. patient cannot undergo (short) NP-movement (cf. c)

Ergo: NIP A seems very different from ExplCanP A
What is the NIP like, 5?

The NIP corresponding to ExplCanP B (green = OK):

1. a. það var sleppt einhverjum anarkistum. (VNIP/√ExplCanP B)
   there was(sg.) released(n.sg.) some anarchists(D.m.pl.)

2. b. það var sleppt anarkistunum. (VNIP/?*ExplCanP B)
   there was(sg.) released(n.sg.) the-anarchists(N.m.pl.def.)

3. c. *það var anarkistunum sleppt. (*NIP/*ExplCanP B)
   there was(sg.) the-anarchists(D.m.pl.def.) released(n.sg.)

Standard (relatively informal) description of NIP B (red = different from ExplP)

1. patient cannot undergo short NP-movement (cf. c).
2. no case conversion and (hence)
3. no agreement
4. no Definiteness Effect (cf. b)

Note that example a is ambiguous and example b can (presumably) only be the NIP (cf. below).
The Origin (and Nature) of the NIP

Foreign influence

- Maling and Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir (M&S, 2002, 2012, etc.) argue that the NIP is an active rather than a passive construction and thus more like the Polish \(-no/to\) construction, cf. their table (2012:255):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syntactic property</th>
<th>Pol/Ukr passive</th>
<th>Polish (-no/to)</th>
<th>Ukrainian (-no/to)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>agentive by-phrase</td>
<td>ok</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>ok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bound anaphors in object position</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>ok</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>control of subject-oriented adjuncts</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>ok</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nonagentive (“unaccusative”) verbs</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>ok</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

M&S argue that the NIP is more similar to the active Polish \(-no/to\) construction than to its Ukrainian passive counterpart. Poles are the largest national minority in Iceland. So could Polish in Iceland be the source for the NIP? What would sociolinguists say in 2114?
The Origin ..., 2

Related to/reinterpreted from impersonal or expletive active constructions where there appears to be no Definiteness Effect:

• The **Observational Expletive** (cf. Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir & Joan Maling (S&M) 2001:129n, 131n; Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson 1989:294ff.):

(1) a. Bjórinn er búinn.
   the-beer(N.m.sg.def.) is finished(m.sg.)

   b. Það er búinn bjórinn.
   there is finished(m.sg.) the-beer(N.m.sg.def.)

(2) a. Tærnar á henni eru svo litlar.
   the-toes(N.pl.f.def.) on her are(pl.) so small(f.pl.)
   ‘Her toes are so small.’

   b. Það eru svo litlar á henni tærnar.
   there are(pl.) so small(f.pl.) on her the-toes(N.pl.f.def.)

(1) A Hvað kom fyrir?  
what came for  
‘What happened?’

B a. Bíllinn bilaði.  
the-car(N.def.) broke-down

b. Það bilaði bíllinn.  
there broke-down the-car(N.def.)

‘Það bilaði bíllinn.’

(1) a. (?)Kertin slokknuðu.
   the-candles(N.n.pl.) went-out(pl.)
   ‘The candles went out.’

   b. Það slokknaði á kertunum.
   there went-out(sg.) on the-candles(D.n.pl.def.)
   ‘The candles went out.’

Cf. also the Eventive Expletive variant (without a PP):

   c. Það slokknuðu kertin.
   there went-out(pl.) the-candles(N.n.pl.def.)
   ‘The candles went out.’
The Origin..., 4

Related to/reinterpreted from impersonal or expletive active constructions where the (indef.) argument can be Acc (so there is no agreement):

• Psych-verb and fate-verb constructions (cf. Halldór 2011:166)

(1) a. Ÿað langaði marga íbúa heim.
    there longed(sg.) many residents(A.m.pl.) home
    ‘Many (of the) residents wanted to go home.’

    b. Ÿað rak marga íbúa að landi.
    there drove(sg.) many residents(A.m.pl.) to land
    ‘Many (of the) residents drifted ashore.’

(cf. also the quite common variant:

(2) %Margir íbúar ráku að landi.
    many residents(N.pl.) drifted(pl.) ashore)
The Origin..., 5

Related to/reinterpreted from Impersonal/Expletive Passive constructions


(1)  a. það var dansað alla nóttina.
    there was danced all night(A)
    ‘People danced all night/There was dancing all night.’

   b. það var talað við strákana í gær.
    there was(sg.) talked to the-boys(A.m.pl.def.) yesterday
    ‘People talked to the boys yesterday.’

   c. það var talað um að fara
    there was talked about to go
    ‘People talked about going.’
The Impersonal Passive, condt.:

- M&S (2012:256): So-called “impersonal passives” are ambiguous:
  
  a. $[e] \ [_{vp} \ var \ dansað]$ Impersonal Passive
  
  b. $[\text{pro}_{arb}] \ [_{vp} \ var \ dansað]$ Impersonal Active

Some speakers at least interpret these constructions as an Impers. Act. This shows e.g. that constructions w. passive morphology can be syntactically active (like the NIP under their account).

Arguments include:
- The presence of a (non-empty but invisible) subject prevents NP-movement in the NIP (the visible argument is an object)
- The presence of a subject blocks the agentive ‘by’-phrase in the NIP
- The presence of a subject explains certain binding and control facts
Halldór (2011): The NIP is just like the prepositional Impers.Pass., except with an empty preposition:

(1) a. Það var talað \([pp \ [p \text{ við } \text{strákana } ]\) í gær.
   there was talked to the-boys(A) yesterday

b. Það var hitt \([pp \ [p \emptyset \text{strákana } ]\) í gær.
   there was met the-boys(A) yesterday

Arguments include:

– The presence of a PP prevents NP-movement in the NIP (no NP-movement out of PPs in Icelandic)

– The presence of a PP explains why there is no Acc-to-Nom conversion (although the case is in fact always determined by the verb, i.e. the empty preposition allows “case transmission” as if it were a particle, cf. also Jóhanna Barðdal and Molnár 2003:245).

(An impersonal null subject (M&S’ analysis) is not incompatible with Halldór’s analysis of the the NIP, cf. the extensive classification of different types of impersonal null subjects in his paper with Egerland 2009.)
The Origin..., 8


(1) a. það var skammað lítið barn. ExplCanP A / NIP
   there was(sg.) scolded(n.sg.) little child(N./A.n.sg.)
   ‘A little child was scolded.’

   b. það var hrint litlum strák. ExplCanP B / NIP
   there was(sg.) pushed(n.sg.) little boy(D.m.sg.)
   ‘A little boy was pushed.’
The Origin..., 9


(1) a. Fólk dreif sig á ball.  
   people hurried REFL to dance  

b. Það var drifið sig á ball.  
   there was hurried REFL to dance  

‘People hurried off to a dance.’

(2) a. Fólk fékk sér hamborgara.  
   people got REFL(A) hamburger  

b. Það var fengið sér hamborgara.  
   there was gotten REFL(D) hamburger  

‘People go themselves a hamburger.’

(The latter type is distransitive, hence the label.)
The Origin..., 10

There are some (relatively) **fixed expressions** that can occur in the active, sound very odd in the ExplCanP but better in the NIP version (cf. Helgi Skúli Kjartansson 1991:21; Einar Freyr 2012:54–55):

(1)  

a. Fólk drap tittlinga.  
   people killed little-birds = ‘People were blinking their eyes.’

b. *Það voru drepnir tittlingar.  
   there were(pl.) killed(m.pl.) little-birds(N.m.pl.)

c. ?Það var drepið tittlinga.  
   there was(sg.) killed(n.sg.) little-birds(A.m.pl.)

(2)  

a. Fólk reif kj aft.  
   people tore mouth = ‘People were shooting their mouth off.’

b. *Það var rifinn kj aftur.  
   there was torn(m.sg.) mouth(N.m.sg.)

c. (?)Það var rifið kj aft.  
   there was torn(n.sg.) mouth(A.m.sg.)
The Origin..., 11

• A source in the formal register?

(1) a. Það var gert grein fyrir þessu.
   there was done(n.sg.) account(A(?).f.sg.) for this
   ‘This was accounted for/explained.’

   b. Það hefur verið gert grein fyrir þessu.
   there has been done(n.sg.) account(A(?).f.sg.) for this
   ‘This has been accounted for/explained.’

Google:  Over 3.600 examples of type a, 9 of type b (one given as an example of 
wrong usage in a booklet from an Icelandic high school).

timarit.is: 38 + 10 examples; the earliest one from 1922

The (correct) alternative:

(2) a. Það var gerð grein fyrir þessu.
   done(f.sg.) account(N.f.sg.)

   b. Það hefur verið gerð grein fyrir þessu.
   done(f.sg.) account(N.f.sg.)

Google: over 20.000 (incl. corections) + 18.000; timarit.is 1.400 + 650 (first from 1891)
Interim conclusion:

- Icelandic has an unusual wealth of “impersonal” (or expletive) constructions, active and passive, that may very well have contributed to the rise of the NIP.

- But the actuation problem remains: Why did the NIP not emerge until late in the 20th century?
An interesting idea about the actuation (Anton, Legate and Yang (ALY) 2012:97–98):

• It is the rise of the DE as a categorical constraint in Icelandic, and not a leakage in it, which forced the reanalysis responsible for the rise of the NIP

ALY claim that examples like (1) are common in Icelandic until the beginning of the 20th century, (1) being the last one (from 1902) attested in IcePaCH (cf. Wallenberg et al. 2011):

(1) ... rétt eftir að farin var vöruferdin.
   right after that gone(f.sg.) was the-product-trip(N.f.sg.def.)
   ‘... right after they went shopping’

ALY claim that the low position is not available to (def.) subjects (themes) anymore. Hence all potentially ambiguous expletive passives would have to be analyzed as the NIP. More below!
Three comments on the (origin and) nature:

- Definiteness Effect (DE) and objecthood of the NIP argument
  **Claim:** The DE is irrelevant for the NIP because it only applies to subjects and the argument in the NIP is an object.

  **Main evidence** (for objecthood):

  (1) a. *Var stúlkuna lamið í klessu?* NIP
      was the-girl(A.f.sg.) beaten(n.sg.) in mess
  b. *Í gær var Harald sótt seint í skólann.* NIP
      yesterday was Harold(A.m.sg.) picked-up(n.sg.) from school
  c. *Stundum var strákinn lamið.* NIP
      sometimes was the-boy(A.m.sg.) beaten(n.sg.)
  d. Stundum var strákurinn laminn. CanP
      sometimes was the-boy(N.m.sg.) beaten(m.sg.)
DE and objecthood, contd.:

- M&S (2002:118): Conclude that facts of this sort are evidence for (active) objecthood of the arguments and not (passive) subjecthood.

Two problems:
1. The same kind of restriction holds for the arguments in the Observational Expletive and the Eventive Expletive (as S&M 2001:129n admit):
   a. Það er búinn bjórinn / *Það er bjórinn búinn.
      there is finished the-beer / there is the-beer finished
   b. Það hafði bilað bíllinn / *Það hafði bíllinn bilað.
      there had broken-down the-the car(N) / there had the-car broken down

2. All the NIP examples tested had a **definite argument**. One can find examples of fronted indef. arguments (also in NAmIcel, cf. Sigríður Mjöll Björnsdóttir 2014:73) and one linguist who is a “native speaker” of NIP found (2b) OK:
   a. fyrstu þrjú árin heyrði ég íslensku talað tvisvar (Internet)
      first three years heard I Icelandic(A.f.sg.) spoken(n.sg.) twice
   b. Það var einhvern strák barið.
      there was some boy(A.m.sg.) beaten(n.sg.)
The empty P analysis:

A prediction not made under the empty P analysis:

- If you are an NIP-speaker who allows binding of reflexives by objects (not all speakers of Icelandic do) then you might find a contrast between the following if the NIP-argument is an object, since local reflexives in Icelandic typically cannot have antecedents within PPs (cf. Höskuldur Thráinsson 2007:463–464 w. refs.). One of the NIP-positive linguists found (1b) slightly better than (1a), the other found both bad:

   Intended: “Somebody called Mary from her (own) phone.”

b. ??Það var barið [{pp [p Ø] Maríu_i] með dúkkunni sinni_i.  
   ‘Somebody hit Mary with her (own) doll.’
Previous research on the diffusion of the NIP


• Judgment task, written questionnaire, two possibilities:
  Put an X in the appropriate column.
  Yes = this is something one can say.
  No = this is something one cannot say.

• Almost 1700 teenagers (15 year olds) and 200 adult controls. Often up to 70% of the youngsters accepted the NIP (depending on sentence type) but almost all the adults rejected it (typically only accepted by approx. 4%).

• Accepted by the teenagers all over the country — often though to less extent in “Inner Reykjavík.”

• Some correlation with the education of the subjects’ parents (higher education, lower acceptance).

Question:
Is the observed difference between generations evidence for “linguistic change in apparent time” or “age grading” (the NIP is just some sort of adolescent language that will disappear).
Previous research..., 2

- 108 participants from 9 different places (12 participants from each place, 3 age groups, 4 from each age group).
- Recording of spontaneous speech in groups of 2–4 participants (44 recordings, a total of approx. 30 hrs.)

FF’s conclusion:
The NIP hadn’t really gained any foothold in the (stable) Icelandic language community at the beginning of the 21st century.

Question:
Does this mean that the acceptance of the NIP by the teenagers in the M&S study was an indication of age grading (i.e. adolescent language) and not of linguistic change in apparent time?
Intermezzo: Age grading, apparent time, real time, etc.

• Assume Figs. 1-2 show acceptance/use of some linguistic construction in different age groups in a given synchronic study.
• Does Fig. 1 then indicate “stability” and Fig. 2 “ongoing change”?
Possible interpretations of figures like 1 and 2 (cf. e.g. Labov 2001a:83; Sankoff and Blondeau 2007:562–563):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>bars (lines):</th>
<th>interpretation:</th>
<th>individual speakers:</th>
<th>linguistic community:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. even (level, cf. fig. 1)</td>
<td>stability</td>
<td>stable</td>
<td>stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. even (cf. fig. 1)</td>
<td>cont. change</td>
<td>change</td>
<td>changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a. uneven (sloping, cf. fig. 2)</td>
<td>age grading</td>
<td>change</td>
<td>stable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b. uneven (cf. fig. 2)</td>
<td>lifetime change</td>
<td>change</td>
<td>changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. uneven (cf. fig. 2)</td>
<td>apparent-time</td>
<td>stable</td>
<td>changes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Age grading**: When a particular linguistic trait decreases or increases with age and this development repeats itself.

**Lifetime change**: When individuals change their language as they grow older and this continues in the same direction with a new generation.
Solving the interpretation problem by a real-time study:

Two kinds of real-time studies (cf. e.g. Sankoff and Blondeau 2007:561):

- **In a trend study** the language of comparable groups of speakers is studied in a similar fashion two or more times with several years in between the studies. That way the direction of any possible change (or diffusion?) can be determined.

- **In a panel study** the language of the same group of speakers (same individuals) is studied in a similar fashion two or more times with several years in between the studies. That way possible changes in the grammars of individual speakers can be studied (or their acquisition of or changes in their use of “different grammars”, cf. Hale 2007).
Previous research..., 3

IceDiaSyn (Icelandic Dialect Syntax) 2005–2008:

- cooperation within the research network ScanDiaSyn
- written questionnaires (+ some interviews), different age groups
- partially a “trend study” building on M&S’ findings for the NIP since IceDiaSyn included comparable age groups (i.e. teenagers again — and also subjects from the same generation)
Typical format of the written questionnaire:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>já</th>
<th>?</th>
<th>nei</th>
<th>Athugasemdir ‘Comments’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Settu X í viðeigandi dálk:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Put an X in the appropriate column.’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>já  = Eðlileg setning. Svona get ég vel sagt.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘yes’</td>
<td>Natural sentence. I could easily say this.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?  = Vafasóm setning. Ég myndi varla segja svona.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Doubtful sentence. I could hardly say this.’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nei = Ótæk setning. Svona get ég ekki sagt.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Impossible sentence. I could not say this.’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>V76</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ég get ekki komið í kvöld.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I cannot come tonight.’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>það var bæði mig að passa krakkana.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“There was asked me to look-after the children”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison of the results of IceDiaSyn and M&S for the NIP (typical expls. with an Acc. argument): Columns 1–4 = different age groups in IceDiaSyn, Column 5 = the teenagers in the study by M&S (i.e., Sigga and Joan, S&J):

- green (top of column) = % of negative judgments
- blue (bottom of column) = % of positive judgments
- red (middle of column) = % of “questionable”

*Figure 3: Judgments of the NIP in IceDiaSyn 2005 and in the M&S study 1999.*
Comments on the comparison:
- The acceptance rate of the teenagers is roughly the same in the two studies (more on this below):
  - IceDiaSyn: 47% positive judgments + 18% questionable judgments
  - M&S: 57% positive judgments (their study only had ‘yes’ and ‘no’)
- The NIP has not spread to the two oldest generations.
- **But:** The acceptance rate by the second youngest age group in IceDiaSyn is **much lower than expected** (only 17% positive, 13% questionable) since this is (partially) the same generation as the one M&S tested (where 57% positive judgments of the NIP examples).

Three possible explanations:
- Teenagers are in general more likely to accept examples in studies like this.
- What M&S found was evidence for **age grading**, not **change in apparent time**.
- The NIP is indeed spreading but what M&S found was an “**adolescent peak**” (more on this below)
Previous research..., 7

The teenagers are not generally more permissive:

**Figure 4: Indefinite inalienable possession**
(hár hennar vs. hárið hennar)

“Mean grade” where 1 = rejects everything; 3 = accepts everything (cf. Höskuldur Thráinsson, Ásta Svavarsdóttir et al. 2013).

**Figure 5: Agreement with Nom. object**
Actuation and the rise of the DE (cf. ALY 2012):

- Is NIP-interpretation of (potentially) ambiguous ExplCanP examples forced if the argument is definite?

(1) a. Það var rekið manninn út af staðnum.
   ‘Therefore the man was kicked out from the place.’

b. Þess vegna var skammað formanninn á fundinum.
   ‘Therefore the chairman was scolded at the meeting.’

c. Það var málað húsið að utan
   ‘The house was painted on the outside and the roof was changed.’

a and b are non-ambiguously NIP, c potentially ambiguous between NIC and ExplCanP
Evaluation of the non-ambiguous NIC examples vs. the ambiguous one in IceDiaSyn:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>yes</th>
<th>?</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1a)</td>
<td>það var rekið manninn ...</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1b)</td>
<td>þess vegna var skammað formannin ...</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>20,7</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1c)</td>
<td>það var málað húsið ...</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>32,4</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So it appears that some speakers allow the ExplCanP interpretation of the potentially ambiguous c-example.
What goes with what? Some constructions tested:

(1) a. *Kata gat ekki keypt sér föt í þessari utanlandsferð.*
   ‘Kata could not buy new clothes in this trip abroad.’
   Það voru búnir *peningarnir.*
   There were(pl.) finished(m.pl.) the -money(N.m.pl. def.)
   ‘There was no money left.’

b. *Stjórnin lýsti yfir óánægju með reksturinn.*
   ‘The board voiced dissatisfaction about the management.’
   Það var rekinn *forstjórinn* skömmu síðar. (ExplCanP)
   there was fired(m.sg.) director-the(N.m.sg.def.) shortly later
   ‘The director was fired shortly after that.’

c. *Vinkonurnar fóru út að borða um kvöldið.*
   ‘The girlfriends dined out that night.’
   Svo var bara drifið *sig* á ball. (ReflP)
   then was just hurried REFL(A) on dance
   ‘Then they just hurried off to a dance.’

d. *Jón hefur átt í erfiðleikum með námið.*
   ‘John has had problems in school.’
   Hann *er* bara *ekki að skilja* stærðfræðína. (ExtProg)
   he is just not to understand the-math
   ‘He just isn’t understanding the math.’
Correlations between judgments of selected constructions in IceDiaSyn:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ObsExpl (def.subj.)</th>
<th>ExplCanP (def.subj.)</th>
<th>Mean ReflP</th>
<th>Mean ExtProg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean NIP</td>
<td>r .246 p .000</td>
<td>r .360 p .000</td>
<td>r .625 p .000</td>
<td>r .325 p .000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Correlations between judgments of selected constructions in IceDiaSyn*

Cf. also Hlíf Árnadóttir et al. 2011:
Those who accept the NIP typically also accept the ReflP — and there is an “acceptability hierarchy of passives”:

\[
\text{ImpersP} \quad > \quad \text{MonotransReflP} \quad > \quad \text{DitransReflP} \quad > \quad \text{NIP}
\]
Linguistic Change in Real Time (RAUN)

The project: **Real time change** in Icelandic phonology and syntax (*Raun*, 2010–2012):

- Mostly a panel study reinterviewing /-testing subjects that participated in previous projects,
- The syntactic part involved **retesting 197 speakers** who participated in M&S‘ original study and come from different parts of the country.
- **6 typical NIP examples** tested in exactly the same way (except that context sentences were included this time). In the part reported on here, the subjects could only answer “yes” and “no” (not “?”) as in the original NIP study.
The NIC examples reported on here:

1. a. *Nokkrir strákar svindluðu á prófinu.*
   some boys cheated on the exam
   Það *var rekið Ólaf úr skólanum.*
   there was expelled Olaf(A) from school

   b. *Uppþvottavélin var biluð í gær.*
   the dish-washer was broken yesterday
   Það *var beðið mig að vaska upp.*
   there was asked me(A) to wash up

   c. *Leigjendurnir skildu eftir fullt af dóti í íbúðinni.*
   the tenants left lots of stuff in the apartment
   Það *var fleygt draslinu á haugana.*
   there was thrown the trash(A) on the garbage-heap

   d. *Ég gat ekki farið í bíó í gærkvöldi.*
   I could not go to cinema last night
   Það *var sagt mér að taka til.*
   there was told me(D) to clean up

   e. Það *var skilið hana eftir heima.*
   there was left her(A) at home

   f. Í gær *var tekið lyklana af honum.*
   yesterday was taken the keys(A) from him
The questions include:

- Is the NIP just “adolescent language”, meaning that what M&S and IceDiaSyn found was thus just evidence for **age grading**, as Finnur Friðriksson (2008, 2011) implied, and not change in apparent time?

- Or can the difference between M&S and IceDiaSyn be interpreted as evidence for an “**adolescent peak**” (cf. e.g. Labov 2001b:106, passim; Tagliamonte and D’Arcy 2009).

- Does “Inner Reykjavík” still have a special status as the place where the NIP is least accepted?
Comparison of the judgments of 197 speakers 1999 & 2012:

• Mean Scores (1 = accepts all, 3 = rejects all):
  - M&S 1999: 1,94
  - RAUN, same speakers 2010–2012: 2,58
    ✓ Speakers who accept fewer NIC expls. 2012 than 1999: 140
    ✓ Speakers who get the same “mean grade” 1999 and 2012: 46
    ✓ Speakers who accept more NIC expls. 2012 than 1999: 11

• Breaking down the numbers:
  - Speakers who reject all relevant NIC examples 2012: 99
  - Speakers who reject all relevant NIC examples 1999 and 2012: 30
  - _ .. _ who reject all relevant NIC expls. 1999 but accept some 2012: 5
  - _ .. _ who reject all relevant NIC expls. 1999 but accept all 2012: 0
  - Accept all 1999 and 2012: 1
  - Accept all 1999 but reject some 2012: 20
  - Accept all 1999 but reject all 2012: 6
Most of the speakers accept fewer NIP examples 10 years later (when they are approx. 25 years old vs. 15 years old).

Still, relatively few of the “NIP-positive” have completely “outgrown the habit”: Only 69 who accepted some NIC examples reject all of them now.

The results confirm the conclusion of IceDiaSyn that speakers typically do not acquire the NIP after the acquisition age (only 5 speakers who rejected all the examples in 1999 accept some now).

But how about age grading vs. adolescent peak?
Adolescent peak and the S-curve:

• It has often been observed that linguistic innovations are “most popular” among adolescents (age range varies somewhat), i.e. more popular than among both younger speakers and older speakers (cf. e.g. Labov 2001b:169ff. and passim, Tagliamonte and D’Arcy 2009, etc.). This is commonly referred to as the adolescent peak.

• The so-called S-curve seems to be a commonly valid description of the diffusion of various kinds of innovations, including linguistic ones (cf. e.g. Kroch 2001:719ff., Blythe and Croft 2012).
Adolescent peaks superimposed on an S-curve:

Figure 6: S-curve with adolescent peaks and post-adolescent troughs.

P1, 2, 3 ... = adolescent peaks 1, 2, 3 ...
T1, 2, 3, ... = post-adolescent troughs 1, 2, 3 ...
Important points expressed by Figure 6:
• Even though T1 is lower than P1 and T2 is lower than P2, etc., P2 should be higher than P1, P3 should be higher than P2, etc. Similarly, T2 should be higher than T1, T3 should be higher than T2, etc. Otherwise there will be no diffusion in the linguistic community.

Important question:
• Does this (i.e. P2 > P1 ..., T2 > T1 ...) hold for the diffusion of the NIC in the Icelandic speech community? If it does, then the NIC is gaining ground, if not, then the NIC is (still) an instance of “adolescent language” and what M&S and IceDiaSyn discovered is age grading and not change in apparent time.
Comparison of “mean scores” in M&S 1999, IceDiaSyn 2006 & RAUN 2012 (where 1 = accepts everything, 3 = rejects everything and we are comparing scores for same or maximally similar examples):

Mean score for P1 (adolescents 1999): 1.94
Mean score for P2 (adolescents 2006): 1.90
Mean score for T1 (post-adolescents 2006): 2.47
Mean score for T2 (post-adolescents 2012): 2.50

Possible conclusions:
- The NIC is (still) just “adolescent language”
- We are (still) at the very bottom of the S-curve (since the NIC is a relatively recent innovation), hence slow diffusion.
Social distribution of the NIC in RAUN

NIC in Inner and Outer Reykjavík in RAUN (cf. M&S):
• Mean grade for those who grew up in Inner Reykjavík: 2.67
• Mean grade for those who grew up in Outer Reykjavík: 2.71
This difference is obviously not statistically significant (p = 0.75)

Correlation with education:
• There is a medium strong and statistically significant correlation with education now, i.e. the more educated speakers are less likely to accept the NIC now (r = 0.340, p< 0.001)

(r > 0.5 is strong correlation, r = 0.3–0.5 is medium correlation and r = 0.1–0.3 is weak correlation, cf. Field 2005:32)
Future Predictions


- They see the development of the NIP as “a test case for a general theory of change. We will explain what is driving the spread of the change. We will take steps towards predicting the rate of change ...” [my emphasis]
Anton, Legate and Yang (ALY) further suggest (2012:93) that (my emphasis):

- “there is a reason to believe that the NP change is a particularly good candidate for a type of variation that is not sensitive to social evaluation”

Base this on Labov and Harris (1986:21):

- Abstract linguistic structure has little or no social impact on members of the community. The interface of language and society is narrow, and primarily on the surface: the words and sounds of the language.

Cf. also Anton Karl, Einar Freyr and Joel Wallenberg 2012.

But: According to Finnur Friðriksson (2011:43), his subjects were more negative towards the NIP than other innovations he studied (Dative Sickness, Extended Progressive ...)

Nordisk syntaxhistoria, Stockholm, 6.11. 2014
Höskuldur Thráinsson
University of Iceland
Some points about ALY’s proposal:

• Assume two competing grammars (two competing grammatical settings) the child’s environment: Canonical Passive (CP) and N(I)P (New Passive) grammars:

\[
\begin{align*}
(9) & \quad a. \text{ Barnið var lamið.} \\
& \quad \text{the.child.NOM/ACC was beaten} \\
& \quad \text{‘The child was beaten’ (√CP, √NP)} \\
& \quad b. \text{ Pað var lamið barnið.} \\
& \quad \text{there was beaten the.child.NOM/ACC} \\
& \quad \text{‘The child was beaten’ (*CP, √NP)}
\end{align*}
\]

a is compatible with the N(I)P-grammar as Topicalization.
b is incompatible with the CP-grammar because of the DE (but see the discussion above)
There are also examples that are incompatible with the N(I)P grammar, but they are very infrequent:

(11) a. Stundum var barn lamið.
    sometimes was child.NOM.ACC beaten
    Sometimes, a child was beaten. (√ CP, *NP)

b. Stundum var lamið barn.
    sometimes was beaten child.NOM.ACC
    Sometimes, a child was beaten. (√ CP, √NP)

b is incompatible with the N(I)P grammar because the NIP does not allow (short) NP-movement (but see the discussion above).
ALY’s conclusions (2012:96, 97, my emphasis):

- Basing their estimation on data from IcePaHC (cf. Wallenberg et al. 2011), ALY estimate that data favoring an N(I)P-grammar over an CP-grammar are about 10 times more common than data favoring a CP-grammar over an N(I)P grammar “which is consistent with reports of [the NIP’s] rapid spread”.
- If the first NIP-examples came into the language around 1950 (cf. M&S), then “language acquisition of a child now should result in around 60% usage of the NP. This seems compatible with reports in the literature ... Moreover, in the absence of independent developments, children should no longer acquire the CP around 2050.”
Some comments on ALY’s proposal:

• Interesting and strong hypothesis.
• Relies on the categorical nature of the DE in Modern Icelandic (but it may not be as categorical as typically assumed).
• Assumes that the CP and the NIP are semantically equivalent (but that is perhaps not entirely clear).
• **Main problem:** The post-adolescent trough and the fact that the NIP does not seem to be spreading as fast as typically assumed (and as fast as it should according to ALY).
Concluding remarks

• The distribution of the NIP suggests that it is “a real linguistic change” (in the sense of Hale 2007 e.g.) in that it seems to be acquired during the acquisition period and not spread across generations like typical changes in frequency of usage (e.g. the Extended Progressive).

• But there is a lot we do not really understand about its actuation and diffusion:
  – Why did the NIP suddenly gain ground in adolescent language towards the end of the last century (the actuation problem)?
  – Why is the NIP not spreading faster than it is — and not as fast as ALY predict? What is the reason for the post-adolescent trough? Can negative attitude really have this kind of effect on syntax?

• We will continue to monitor the developments of the NIC in order to learn more about the nature of linguistic change, much like Icelandic geologists are monitoring the current volcanic eruption in Iceland in order to understand geology.


References, 2


