OV – and what else?
What can we learn from the development of OV in Icelandic?

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1. A brief review of some OV-patterns in Old Icelandic and proposed accounts

2. More detailed studies of the decline of the OV-patterns in the history of Icelandic

3. Other OV-like patterns in Icelandic

4. Comparison with variation in Modern Icelandic

5. Concluding remarks
A brief review of some OV-facts in Old Icelandic and proposed accounts
OV/VO alternation in Old Icelandic


(1) a1 skalt þú jafnan
shall you always
[þessu sæti halda]
this seat keep
O\textsubscript{NP}-V (Halldór)

a2 Eg mun
I will
[þiggja hrossin]
accept the-horses
V-O\textsubscript{NP} (Eiríkur)

b1 Faðir minn mun
father my will
[því ráða]
that decide
O\textsubscript{Pron}-V(Eiríkur)

b2 mátt þú nú
can you now
[sjá hana]
see her
V-O\textsubscript{Pron}(Halldór)

c1 er hann hafði
that he had
[af Filippo tekið]
from Philip taken
PP-V (Halldór)

c2 það mál var
that matter was
[lagt undir Sighvat ...]
laid under Sighvatur
V-PP (Halldór)

d1 ekki mun ég
not will I
[pennan mann séð hafa]
this man seen have
O\textsubscript{NP}-V-Aux (Eiríkur)

d1 að sárið mundi
tha the-wound would
[hafa grandað honum]
have killed him
Aux-V-O\textsubscript{Pron} (Eiríkur)

Visby, Gotland, September 27, 2017
Höskuldur Thráinsson
OV - and what else?

HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS
Greenberg 1963:

- Three basic types of languages:
  - Type I: VSO, Type II: SVO, Type III: SOV
- Universal 4. With overwhelmingly greater than chance frequency, languages with normal SOV order are postpositional.
- Universal 16. [...] In languages with dominant order SOV, an inflected auxiliary always follows the main verb.

Cf. also Dryer (1992):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VO correlate</th>
<th>OV correlate*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>copula verb - predicate</td>
<td>predicate - copula verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>verb - PP</td>
<td>PP - verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tense/aspect auxiliary - VP</td>
<td>VP - tense/aspect auxiliary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun - genitive</td>
<td>genitive - noun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complementizer - S</td>
<td>S - complementizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noun - relative clause</td>
<td>relative clause - noun</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Many of the correlations can be obscured by other constraints, e.g. V2
Popular accounts ...

The Principles and Parameters approach (Chomsky 1981 and much later work):

The Head(-Directionality) Parameter to account for cross-linguistic variation:
• Languages are either left-headed (govern to the right) or right-headed (govern to the left)

A possible account of variations within languages:
• Kroch 1989 (and Pintzuk 1991 much later work) on Old(er) English: Variation of this sort reflects “grammar competition”. Eventually one of the grammars (say the VO-grammar) will win out.
Early studies of OV vs. VO in Old Icelandic

Halldór 1988:
- **Old Icelandic**: 4 single ms. texts: 1200–1350.

Eiríkur 1994/1995, 1996:
1. **Old Icelandic**: Concordances base on recent editions of the Icelandic family sagas, Sturlunga saga and Heimskringla: 13th–14th centuries.

Cf. also Þorsteinn 1987:
- **Older Icelandic**: Excerpts from 18 texts: 13th–19th century
Early studies ...

**Halldór 1988** (predates Kroch 1989, Pintzuk 1991, etc.):

- OI (approx. 1150−1350) was “at a late intermediate stage in a development from SOV to SVO, deriving OV patterns from a basic VO order” (p. 5)

- Halldór rejects a “bidirectionality hypothesis” approach.
Early studies ...

- It is shown that even though the IP in Old Icelandic was clearly head-initial [...] the headedness of the VP is far from obvious. The majority of the logically possible word order patterns actually occur in the VP in Old Icelandic, and because of the frequency and stability of OV-order, together with the distribution of pronominal objects and particles, it is not feasible to assume that the VP in Old Icelandic was uniformly either head-initial or head-final. By assuming that the head parameter was unspecified, we can account for the great majority of all Old Icelandic sentences without positing any movement of constituents of the VP, except for postposing of full NPs; this appears to be the most natural way of accounting for the variation.
A theoretical monkey-wrench

Kayne 1994 (informally):

- All languages are “underlyingly” head-initial (or Specifier-Head-Complement-languages). Any deviation from Spec-Head-Comp order, e.g. in SOV-languages, must be explained by movement.
Þorbjörg 1996, 2000:

• **Old(er) Icelandic was an SVO-language** and the surface OV-orders are derived by various movements (e.g. short and long object movement, (remnant) VP-preposing).

An Kaynean-approach, rather similar in spirit to Halldór’s ...
More details on the decline of the OV-orders in the history of Icelandic
The data

Þorbjörg 2000 and 2008:

• 2000: Excerpts from 16 14th–19th century texts, 25–30 pages (500–1000 lines) from each + a collection of 19th century letters (DOB of writers 1730-1870)
• 2008: Excerpts from the same 16 texts, 55 pages (8,500 sentences) from each + the collection of 19th century letters.

Anton 2016 and this presentation:

• IcePaHC – a tagged and parsed corpus, based on 61 12th-21st century texts, over 1,000,000 words (approx. 100,000 words from each centur (except for the 12th and the 21st) – cf. below.
Preverbal NPs and PPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centuries</th>
<th>14th</th>
<th>15th</th>
<th>16th</th>
<th>17th</th>
<th>18th</th>
<th>19th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Porbjörg 2000: % OV orders (N)</td>
<td>45 (98)</td>
<td>47 (67)</td>
<td>50 (64)</td>
<td>42 (148)</td>
<td>23 (31)</td>
<td>12 (202)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porbjörg 2000: % PPV orders (N)</td>
<td>53 (47)</td>
<td>44 (36)</td>
<td>45 (29)</td>
<td>39 (70)</td>
<td>32 (28)</td>
<td>13 (147)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Development of the relative frequency of OV- and PPV-orders in Icelandic

Figure 1: Graphical representation of the development according to Table 1

Possible objection: These figures are based on a relatively small corpus.
Preverbal pronominal and non-pronominal object

Þorðbjörg 2008: Same texts as 2000 but enlarged corpus (cf. above)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centuries</th>
<th>14th</th>
<th>15th</th>
<th>16th</th>
<th>17th</th>
<th>18th</th>
<th>19th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Þorðbjörg 2000: OV % (N)</td>
<td>45 (98)</td>
<td>47 (67)</td>
<td>50 (64)</td>
<td>42 (148)</td>
<td>23 (31)</td>
<td>12 (202)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorðbjörg 2008: OV % (N)</td>
<td>43 (167)</td>
<td>47 (120)</td>
<td>46 (103)</td>
<td>41 (256)</td>
<td>22 (52)</td>
<td>12 (357)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Development of the OV-orders in Icelandic – different size corpora.

Figure 2: Graphical representation of the development according to Table 2
More objections

Maybe Þorbjörg’s results are unreliable or skewed because:

- Her selection of texts was not representative enough. Note in particular that her 19th century texts include personal letters which may be more representative of the spoken language.
- She counted the examples manually instead of employing more sophisticated methods using computer-generated concordances or search programs and parsed and tagged corpora.

So let’s compare her results to results obtained by using IcePaHC (Icelandic Parsed Historical Corpus, cf. Eiríkur et al. 2012, Wallenberg et al. 2011).
IcePaHC

Coverage, size and genres (from Eiríkur et al. 2012):
• 61 texts of various kinds (average 6 texts per century)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Century</th>
<th>nar</th>
<th>rel</th>
<th>bio</th>
<th>sci</th>
<th>law</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>40871</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4439</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13th</td>
<td>93463</td>
<td>21196</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6183</td>
<td>120842</td>
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<td>21315</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>98685</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15th</td>
<td>111560</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>111560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16th</td>
<td>35733</td>
<td>60464</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>96197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17th</td>
<td>46281</td>
<td>28134</td>
<td>52997</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>127412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th</td>
<td>63322</td>
<td>22963</td>
<td>22099</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>108384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th</td>
<td>100362</td>
<td>20370</td>
<td>3268</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>124000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20th</td>
<td>103921</td>
<td>21234</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>125155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st</td>
<td>43102</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>43102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>675114</td>
<td>236547</td>
<td>75096</td>
<td>7707</td>
<td>6183</td>
<td>1000647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Periods (centuries)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12th</td>
<td>13th</td>
<td>14th</td>
<td>15th</td>
<td>16th</td>
<td>17th</td>
</tr>
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<td>12 (357)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anton 2016: %OV (N)</td>
<td>32 (46)</td>
<td>30 (20)</td>
<td>36 (18)</td>
<td>25 (16)</td>
<td>37 (31)</td>
<td>34 (32)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Development of OV-orders in Icelandic in three studies

Figure 3: Graphical representation of the development according to Table 3

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OV - and what else?
Comments on the studies

Similarities:
• Relatively stable OV-ratio until the 18th and 19th century.
• Sharp drop in the 19th century (and no OV-examples from the 20th century in Anton’s study)

Differences:
• Lower OV-ratio for 14th–17th century in Anton’s data (12th–13th also low)
• More “peaks” and “valleys” in Anton’s data

Note:
• The inclusion of personal letters in Þorbjörg’s 19th century data is not responsible for the drop in OV-ratio – we find the same phenomenon in the IcePaHC data.
More on Þorbjörg’s 19th century letters

Figure 4: Percentage of OV-type word orders in Þorbjörg’s (2000) 19th century letters

- The percentage of OV-orders keeps going down in the 19th century letters.
Interim summary

• The rate of OV-constructions considered so far (nominal complements and PPs) is fairly stable in the history of Icelandic (approx. 30–50%) until the 18th when it begins to decline and then it drops drastically in the 19th century. This was also the estimate obtained by Eiríkur (1994/1995, 1996) and Þorsteinn (1987) in their preliminary studies.

• The researchers seem to agree that the OV-orders are basically out in Modern Icelandic (cf. also Anton’s results for the 20th century).
Nonpronominal vs. pronominal objects

OV-orders are more common throughout the history of Icelandic when the object is pronominal according to Þorbjörg’s study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centuries</th>
<th>14th</th>
<th>15th</th>
<th>16th</th>
<th>17th</th>
<th>18th</th>
<th>19th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% O_{Pron}V (N) Þorbjörg 2008</td>
<td>74 (92)</td>
<td>75 (54)</td>
<td>83 (34)</td>
<td>57 (162)</td>
<td>32 (27)</td>
<td>20 (1050)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% O_{NP}V (N) Þorbjörg 2008</td>
<td>29 (75)</td>
<td>38 (66)</td>
<td>38 (69)</td>
<td>28 (94)</td>
<td>17 (25)</td>
<td>6 (99)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: The frequency (%) of pronominal and nonpronominal objects in preverbal position

Figure 5: Graphical representation of the development according to Table 4
Nonpronominal vs. pronominal ...

One can also separate nonpronominal and pronominal objects when searching IcePaHC and get a similar picture:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>12th</th>
<th>13th</th>
<th>14th</th>
<th>15th</th>
<th>16th</th>
<th>17th</th>
<th>18th</th>
<th>19th</th>
<th>20th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IcePaHC: $%O_{Pron}V$ (N)</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(19)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IcePaHC: $%O_{NP}V$ (N)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(17)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: The frequency (%) of pronominal and nonpronominal objects in preverbal position

Figure 6: Graphical representation of the development according to Table 5.
Nonpronominal vs. pronominal ...

Some remarks:

• OV-orders are more common throughout the history of Icelandic if the object is a pronoun than if it is a full NP.

• The nature of the text can influence the ratio of pronouns vs. full NPs and hence the relative frequency of OV-orders as a whole.

• Sudden “peaks” and “valleys” in the development of the OV-order can stem from particular properties of a single text:
  - All 7 examples of preverbal full NP objects in the 18th century texts in IcePaHC come from the same text (Vídalínspostilla)
  - 8 out of the 10 examples of preverbal full NP objects in the 18th century texts in IcePaHC come from the same text (Eintal sálarinnar)
Other (but related) relevant properties of the objects

Old vs. new information:

Table 6: The frequency (%) of preverbal objects of varying information content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centuries</th>
<th>14th</th>
<th>15th</th>
<th>16th</th>
<th>17th</th>
<th>18th</th>
<th>19th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Þorbjörg 2008: % ONPOldinfoV (N)</td>
<td>81 (156)</td>
<td>82 (110)</td>
<td>82 (77)</td>
<td>67 (215)</td>
<td>48 (39)</td>
<td>20 (261)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorbjörg 2008: % ONPNewinfoV (N)</td>
<td>27 (75)</td>
<td>26 (48)</td>
<td>28 (50)</td>
<td>20 (79)</td>
<td>17 (20)</td>
<td>6 (84)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7: Graphical representation of the development as represented in Table 6
Heaviness (length in words) of the objects:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 7: The frequency (%) of preverbal objects of varying size (heaviness)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Century</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porbjörg 2008: % ONP&lt;sub&gt;1word&lt;/sub&gt;V (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porbjörg 2008: % ONP&lt;sub&gt;2words&lt;/sub&gt;V (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porbjörg 2008: % ONP&lt;sub&gt;3words&lt;/sub&gt;V (N)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 8: Graphical representation of the development as represented in Table 7**
Additional types of preverbal “complements”

(examples taken from Halldór, Eiríkur and Þorbjörg, cf. the refs. above):

1. Non-finite main verbs preceding non-finite auxiliaries:
   Þú munt [frétt hafa] ...
   you will heard have

2. Adjectives, adverbs, particles ... (Þorbjörg’s XPs):
   a. Þú munt nú [satt segja]
      you will now true say
   b. að Grettir hafi [sterkastur verið]
      that G. has strongest been
   a. Hún segir hann [heima vera]
      she says him at-home be
   b. áður sól var [niður runnin]
      before sun was down run
Non-finite main verbs and “XPs”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Periods (centuries)</th>
<th>14th</th>
<th>15th</th>
<th>16th</th>
<th>17th</th>
<th>18th</th>
<th>19th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Þorbjörg 2000 MainAux %</td>
<td></td>
<td>78 (25)</td>
<td>47 (7)</td>
<td>59 (16)</td>
<td>44 (17)</td>
<td>32 (6)</td>
<td>12 (36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Þorbjörg 2000 XPV %</td>
<td></td>
<td>81 (103)</td>
<td>81 (61)</td>
<td>74 (45)</td>
<td>72 (142)</td>
<td>63 (40)</td>
<td>21 (191)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8: Frequency (%) of pre-auxiliary main verbs and preverbal “XPs” in Older Icelandic

Figure 9: Graphical presentation of the percentages in Table 8.

Similar development as in the case of other “OV-”structures.

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OV - and what else?

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A summary of the developments

Figure 10: Development of the “simple OV-structures” counted by Þorbjörg 2000.

- The development of all these “OV-type patterns” is virtually identical.
- All these OV-type patterns have now (virtually) disappeared from the Icelandic language – but it took a looooong time.
Other OV-like patterns in Icelandic
Negative and quantified preverbal objects

Preverbal NPs counted by Þorbjörg (2000, 2008) and Anton (2016) include negative and quantified phrases:

(1) a. en Jökull vill but Jökull wants [engri sætt játa] no reconciliation accept (IcePaHC, 14th]
b. Við höfum we have [engan mat fengið] í dag no food gotten today (Þorbjörg 2000, 16th)
c. hefur páfinn ... has the-pope [alla veröld ært] all world driven-crazy (Þorbjörg, 16th)
d. Kristí ríki mun Christ’s kingdom will [engan enda taka] no end take (IcePaHC, 18th)
e. Hann gat he could [ekkert veitt oss] nothing give us (Þorbjörg, 19th)
Negative phrases ...

• Negative and quantified NPs are still possible in preverbal position in Modern Icelandic (cf. Eiríkur 1987, Höskuldur 2007:82–84, Svenonius 2000, Þorbjörg 2000; cf. also Christensen 1986 and many others on negative objects in Mainland Scandinavian).

• Negative objects must precede the verb in Modern Icelandic while (other) quantified objects can also occur in postverbal position (cf. Eiríkur 1987 and later work):

(1) a. Jón hefur [ekkert gert]/* [gert ekkert]
   John has nothing done/*done nothing

   b. Jón hefur [enga nemendur hitt]/*[hitt enga nemendur]
   John has not students met / *met no students

   c. Hann hefur [marga móðgað] / [móðgað marga]
   he has many insulted / insulted many
Eiríkur (1987) mentions a few examples of postverbal negative objects in Old Icelandic sources including this one:

(1) Dálkur skal [taka *engar bætur*] fyrir sig
    Dálkur shall take no compensation for himself

Þorbjörg (2000:127–129) says that out of the 610 preverbal NPs she found in her study (cf. *Table 3*), 102 were negative or quantified (about 17%) but “No examples of postverbal negative objects were found in the corpus.”

Search in IcePaHC (using Anton’s (2016) PaCQL query language) indicates that 20 out of the 183 preverbal objects (about 11%) were negative or quantified.

No examples of postverbal negative objects were found in IcePaHC but several quantified objects.
Stylistic Fronting

cf. Maling (1980), Halldór (2017) and MANY others in between.

- We can get apparent OV-patterns of all the typical kinds through Stylistic Fronting, e.g. in relative clauses. Examples (mostly through Google or *Timarit.is*, some of them via Halldór’s paper):

(1) a. sem bækurnar lásu that the-books read
   b. sem þær lásu that them read
   c. sem um það hugsa that with him were
   d. sem bestir eru that best are
   e. sem fram komu that forth came
   f. sem dáið hafa that died have

NPO-V
PronO-V
PP-V
“XP”-V
“XP”-V
main-Aux
Stylistic Fronting through the ages

Searching the IcePaHC corpus gives the following results for Stylistic Fronting of NPs and PPs in relative clauses (frequency per 1000 words of text):

![Graph showing frequency of stylistic fronting over centuries](image)

*Figure 11: Frequency of Stylistic Fronting in IcePaHC: Number of occurrences per 1000 words*

(This translates to roughly 40–200 occurrences per century given a corpus size of 100,000 words per century.)
Stylistic Fronting ...

Eiríkur (1996:77):
Even though Stylistic Fronting is still perfectly grammatical and frequent in Modern Icelandic, it is often not applied where it could have been used. This contrasts sharply with many earlier texts, where it seems that Stylistic Fronting is almost always applied if at all possible.

Halldór (2017:325, 336):
The statistics presented in this section confirm that SF in subject relatives is robust in everyday written Icelandic. Nevertheless they show, first, that SF is markedly less frequent on the World Wide Web than in Timarit.is, and, second, that the frequency of SF in Timarit.is declines over time [...]

This survey shows that SF is robust in potential SF contexts in every day written Icelandic, even though the data strongly suggest that it is presently losing ground against V1 in subject relatives and against það-V in impersonal clauses (p. 336).

Höskuldur, Ásgrímur and Heimir Freyr (2015):
Younger speakers are somewhat more likely than older ones to reject or question SF examples.
Comparison with variation in Modern Icelandic
Interim summary – and some questions

• **The OV-patterns** found in Older Icelandic show the same development, regardless of the type of “complement”: They are fairly stable until the 18th century, virtually disappear in the 19th century and they are **ungrammatical in Modern Icelandic** (except for preposing of negative and quantified complements). Why did they all disappear at the same time?

• **Stylistic Fronting** (of NPs and PPs) shows a very similar development through the ages: It’s frequency starts going down in the 18th century, it becomes even less frequent in the 19th century and it is still going down. But it is **grammatical in Modern Icelandic**.

• All studies report on an OV/VO-variation throughout the history of Icelandic (until the 20th century). **What kind of a variation is this** and what does it tell us about the nature of linguistic knowledge?
The simultaneous disappearance of the OV-patterns

Eiríkur 1996:
• The OV/VO-variation in Older Icelandic indicates that the relevant parameter [Eiríkur was assuming the Head Parameter] had not been fixed. Children could not fix it because of the variable input, the common SF-structures and referential null objects being a part of the reason. But with the loss of “free indexing” of pro around 1800 (cf. Halldór 1993) and the introduction of expletive það competing with Stylistic Fronting, it became possible to fix the parameter as VO.

Þorbjörg (2000:351):
• VO-orders won out because of “a single parametric change: the loss of \([V_{\text{main}} – V_{\text{aux}}]\) or, in more general terms, the loss of extracting VPs out of VPs, leading to the superficial loss of all the other attested OV word order patterns”.

So how “parametric” was this change?
The nature of the OV/VO variation

Eiríkur (1996:67) on the “grammar competition” he assumes:

• However, it is not clear that it is necessary for speakers who use Grammar B to be able to produce sentences with OV-order; it might be argued that it is only necessary for them to understand such sentences, and only as long as there are still speakers who use Grammar A. It is of course common knowledge that being able to understand some construction does not necessarily entail the ability of actually using this construction in one’s own speech. For instance, speakers of Modern Icelandic usually have no difficulties in reading and understanding Old Icelandic sentences with pure OV-order, even though this order is ungrammatical in Modern Icelandic [...] it seems rather unlikely that several generations of speakers using Grammar B would have continued using OV-sentences productively after reanalysis had taken place.

Questions:

• Did speakers of Older Icelandic produce both orders?
• How likely is that, given what we know about synchronic variation?
The nature of the OV/VO-variation

A question:

• Is the variation we find for each century an **inter-text variation** (some texts in any given century have OV-order, other texts have VO-order) or **intra-text variation** (OV- and VO-orders occur in the same text)?
Figure 12: The frequency (%) of preverbal objects (full NPS and pronominal NPs) and preverbal PPs in individual texts in Þorbjörg’s study (2000)

Considerable “intra-text” variation (except for the second 19th century text)
Figure 13: The frequency (%) of preverbal pronominal objects and preverbal full NP objects in IcePaHC (omitting texts where with fewer than 4 examples of “preposable” objects of each kind)

Considerable “intra-text” variation (except for the one 16th century text and the 18th, 19th and 20th century texts)
OV/VO-variation

Possible reasons for the intra-text variation:

• The published texts are based on an **amalgam of manuscripts**
  ➢ May hold for some of the sagas for instance but not for all the texts involved (cf. Halldór’s selection of texts for his 1988 paper)

• The relevant manuscripts are **not originals** and thus it is not clear whose language is being represented
  ➢ Does not hold for all the texts, e.g. not the 19th century letters

• The reason is **the nature of the OV-structures**: optionality, sensitivity to heaviness and information structure ...
  ➢ Possibly (although it is difficult under many approaches to reconcile this with proposed parametric change, changes in feature strength, reanalysis etc.)
Intra-speaker variation in Modern Icelandic syntax

The IceDiaSyn project (Icelandic Dialect Syntax, cf. ScanDiaSyn):

• Three parts, N 714–772, four age groups, all parts of the country, mostly written questionnaires asking for judgments, selecting between alternative variants or filling in blanks.

The judgment task:

yes = A natural sentence. I could easily say this.
? = A questionable sentence. I could hardly say this.
no = An unacceptable sentence. I could not say this.

Different ways of estimating intra-speaker variation in this project:

• A: Does a given speaker accept some but not all examples of the same construction ("other things being equal")?
• B: Does a given speaker accept (and/or use) two (or more) variants when there is "categorical variation", e.g. choice of Acc vs. Dat case?
Younger and older speakers and SF

Commonly accepted SF examples: Single, monosyllabic element

(1)  a. hvert  raett  hefði  verið  við  Helgu
      whether  spoken  had  been  to  Helga

  b.  sem  lagn  hefur  verið  fram  á  Alþingi
      that  put  has  been  forth  in  Althing

  c.  sem  upp  hafa  komið
      that  up  have  come

• Around 90% of the oldest speakers find these examples natural whereas only 60–65% of the youngest speakers do.
Younger and older speakers and SF

Figure 14: Evaluation by the youngest and oldest speakers of three Stylistic Fronting examples

3 = speakers who found all three examples natural
1 = speakers who rejected all three examples
in between: speakers who liked some examples and not others or found
some of the examples questionable

Possibility: Maybe the youngest speakers are less sure of their judgments?
Younger and older ... and inalienable possession

Examples with a definite article on nouns referring to inalienable possession (body parts):

(1) a. Hún verður að bursta **tennurnar** sínar oftar
   she has to brush **the-teeth her** more-often

   b. **Nefið** hans er rautt og **þrútið**
      the-nose his is read and **swollen**

   c. Þú stendur á **fætinum mínun**
      you stand on **the-foot my**

   d. Hann var hættur að geta snert **tærnar** sínar
      he was finished to be-able-to touch **the-toes his**

About 65–78 % of the youngest speakers find these sentences natural but only 37–50% of the oldest speakers.
Figure 15: Evaluation by the youngest and oldest speakers of four examples involving inalienable possession

3 = accepts all four examples, 1 = accepts none of the examples ...

Here there is more intra-speaker variation among the oldest subjects.
Dative subjects and objects

A relatively long-standing process: Dat is being substituted for Acc as the subject case of a class of experiencer verbs (Dative Substitution (or Sickness) see most recently Þórhallur and Höskuldur 2017 w. references):

(1) a. Okkur Þorvaldi me and Thorvaldur.DAT langar að fara ... want to go
   b. Strákunum the-boys.DAT langar til að fara ... want to go

A more recent process: Dat is being substituted for Acc as the object case of a class of verbs that take a theme object:

(2) a. Herinn hafði the-army had rústað þeim demolished them.DAT
   b. Skagamenn IA (a soccer team) rústuðu þeim demolished them.DAT
Dative subjects and objects

Results from IceDiaSyn show that there is much greater intra-speaker variation in the assignment of subject case to the subject of (the relevant class of) experiencer verbs than in the assignment of object case to (the relevant class of) theme-object verbs (see also Höskuldur 2013:173–175):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Acc. subject</th>
<th>Dat. subject</th>
<th>Acc + Dat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>langa</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rústa</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of speakers (%) who find Acc and/or Dat natural as subject case of langa and object case of rústa.
Dative subjects and objects

Figure 16: Evaluation of sentences w. Dat. subjects of ‘want’ and Dat. object of rústa ‘demolish’ (two examples of each kind, cf. above).
3 = accepts both examples, 1 = rejects both examples ...

The more recent change is winning out fast!
Accounting for the intra-speaker variation

The most promising way of accounting for the observed intra-speaker variation seems to be in terms of “grammar competition” along the lines originally suggested by Kroch (1989) and further developed by Yang (2002 and later), informally:

• When the input (the “primary linguistic data” in the environment) is inconsistent or ambiguous, it will be difficult for speakers to choose between alternative grammars (or alternative settings of a parameter ... ) so they won’t necessarily do so (although they may gradually lean towards one of the alternatives).

For further elaboration of these ideas in Icelandic and Faroese contexts see e.g. Iris Edda (2017) and Höskuldur (2017a, b) and references cited there.
Concluding remarks
Most important points

• There is **relatively stable** OV/VO-variation in Icelandic for 6–7 centuries but in the 19th century the VO-patterns win out.

• The change in the 19th century **affects all types** of verbal “complements”: full NP objects, pronominal objects, PPs, predicative adjectives, particles, non-finite main verbs ..., which calls for a common explanation.

• Certain types of “complements” are **more common in preverbal position** throughout (pronouns, old information, shorter complements ...), but even the common types die out in the 19th century, together with the less common ones.

• The OV/VO-variation is not only an inter-text variation but also **intra-text**: Both variants are found in most of the texts, to varying degrees.

• The intra-text variation observed has parallels in synchronic variation in Modern Icelandic syntax, for instance, where “**grammar competition**” has been suggested as a promising account. It is in fact very similar to what Eiríkur suggested 20 years ago for OV/VO.
References


References


References

IcePaHC – see Wallenberg et al. 2011.
References


