

SUMMARY

This overview chapter briefly outlines partly known and partly novel evidence of syntactic variation in Old Norse-Icelandic that is either similar to modern phenomena discussed in other contributions to this book or at least resemble them superficially. These include variation in the case marking of subjects as well as objects, the rise of the expletive *þat* ‘it’ (later *það*) and the support verb *gera* ‘do’, similar in part to English *do*-support. As discussed in some detail in this paper, the wide range of dative beneficiaries or applicatives in Old Norse-Icelandic, which are highly restricted in present-day Icelandic, can result in cases reminiscent of Dative Substitution (see also chapter 7.2 in *Tilbrigðabók II*), but only on the surface. What is particularly revealing about these examples is the striking absence of any clear instances of the accusative case on the object, typically resulting instead in DAT-NOM structures. It is argued that Old Norse-Icelandic dative applicatives could be merged in a ‘high’ position independent of the basic thematic structure of the verb in contrast to Modern Icelandic datives which are all ‘low’ and lexically assigned. Similarly, variation attested in object case-marking is shown to be fundamentally different from the present tendency for accusative-assigning verbs denoting movement to occur with the dative case — in Old Norse-Icelandic apparently the other way around, nominative/accusative structural case appearing in dative contexts. The third phenomenon discussed concerns the existence of expletive *þat* in the Early Old Norse-Icelandic period (before 1350) and the brief appearance of a distinction between quasi-argumental (*þat* ‘it’) and non-argumental (*þar* ‘there’) expletives in later centuries — the latter presumably due, at least partly, to translation effects.

The fourth and final phenomenon involves *gera*-support which occurs in the oldest attested (12th-century) Icelandic prose, mainly in negated sentences and clearly associated with contrastive focus. Corresponding uses in poetry are found as early as the 10th century with the bound negation marker *-a/(a)t*, alongside *gera*-support triggered by V/VP-fronting. As is well-known, the negation suffix (originally emphatic) triggered fronting of the verb to the left periphery. It is argued that the auxiliary use of *gera* grammaticalised somehow during this period while the negation was a head, thus subject to the head-movement constraint. The later introduction of the adverbial negation marker *eigi* ‘not’ (later *ekki*), a specifier, not a head, could arguably be seen as a contributing factor to the subsequent loss of *gera*-support. If on the right track, this state of affairs could largely be described as a mirror image of the development of English *do*-support. Due to the scarcity of the sources from the earliest period, it is somewhat unclear whether *gera*-support was relatively widespread as opposed to being a dialect feature that was ‘levelled’ later on, originating perhaps in Norse settlements in close contact with Celtic, as has been suggested also for English.