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How Icelandic can you be, if you speak Icelandic B?

Hans-Martin Gärtner

It has proven useful to distinguish two groups of “non-residual” Germanic V2 languages.¹ Following Vikner’s (1995) characterization, I will call the ones showing “limited embedded V2” (Dutch, Frisian, German, and Mainland Scandinavian) LV2 languages, and the ones showing “general embedded V2” (Icelandic and Yiddish) GV2 languages. Descriptively the limitations that distinguish LV2 from GV2 languages concern the availability of V2 in non-interrogative subordinate or “dependent” clauses.² In LV2 languages, this availability is – to a first approximation – restricted to complements of a set of predicates standing in a close – but not yet satisfactorily understood – relationship to Urmson’s (1963) “parenthetical verbs”, Hooper and Thompson’s (1973) “assertive predicates”, and Erteschik-Shir’s (1977) “bridge verbs”. Some additional V2 environments in LV2 languages are degree word complements (de Haan and Weerman 1986), causal and concessive clauses (Wechsler 1991), relative(-like) clauses (Gärtner 2001), and arguments of “preference predicates” (Frank 1998, 2000). In all of these cases there exist restrictions on the matrix clause concerning the scope of operators like negation and modals as well as sentential mood.

GV2 languages, on the other hand, are generally taken to be free of such restrictions. For Icelandic, this has been documented quite comprehensively in Iatridou and Kroch (1992). Interestingly, however, Jónsson (1996) challenged a core set of the acceptability judgments involved in classifying Icelandic as GV2. He then went on to suggest that there must be two variants or “dialects” of Icelandic, one, called “Icelandic A”, being the more widely known GV2

¹ For residual V2 languages, see Rizzi (1996).

² The issue of V2 in embedded interrogatives must be divided into two parts. First, whether or not subject - finite verb inversion can take place in the highest projection of the clause, leading to the embedding of what looks like direct questions. Secondly, whether or not such subject - finite verb inversion plus XP-fronting (= “V2”) can take place one projection further down. The latter has repeatedly been discussed in terms of locality theory and “topic islands” (cf. Vikner 1995). Evidence for this kind of structure is provided by Iatridou and Kroch (1992: 9). Curiously – especially in the light of our discussion below – the one perfectly acceptable example is introduced by the first person singular pronoun “ég” plus the verb “ask”, which most easily licenses features of direct questions to be transported into (reported) indirect ones.

language, and a second, called “Icelandic B”, which must be considered an LV2 language like Mainland Scandinavian.

This assumption has at least two kinds of implication. First, it raises interesting (sociolinguistic) questions about the influence of (the use of) Mainland Scandinavian (as L2) on (speakers of) Icelandic. Secondly, Icelandic B can be a valuable tool for the formal analysis of the GV2/LV2 distinction. Thus, Jónsson (1996) argues that an asymmetric “CP/IP-analysis” of Icelandic, where fronted non-subjects and operators target Spec,CP, subjects (and expletive *það*) Spec,IP,³ is superior to a symmetric “IP-account” with basically only one landing site for fronted XPs, namely, Spec,IP (cf. Rögnvaldsson and Thráinsson 1990). This argument is based on the claim that the former analysis more straightforwardly accommodates *both* dialects.⁴

It is equally interesting to reconsider Holmberg and Platzack’s (1995) account of GV2 in the light of Icelandic B. According to their approach, it is the presence vs. absence of *Agr* in I° and, after V°-to-I°-to-C° has applied, in C° which crucially distinguishes GV2 from LV2 languages. In particular, it is assumed that, in Icelandic, *Agr* in C° is able to license a second “finiteness operator” [+F] in the higher C° of a CP recursion structure, (1a). This option is absent in the *Agr*-less counterpart (1b).

- (1) a. ...[_{CP} C°_[+F] [_{CP} XP [_{C'} [_{C°} [_{I°} V°-I°_[+Agr]] C°_[+F]] [_{IP} ...]]]]
 b. ...[_{CP} C° [_{CP} XP [_{C'} [_{C°} [_{I°} V°-I°] C°_[+F]] [_{IP} ...]]]]

Being lexicalized not by a finite verb but by a complementizer, the higher [+F] exempts the entire CP from “main clause interpretation”. In *Agr*-less Mainland Scandinavian, however, CP recursion allows only one realization of [+F], which due to certain assumptions about government must be lexicalized by the finite verb in the lower C°. This, according to Holmberg and Platzack (1995: 86), induces “main clause interpretation”, which in turn is responsible for the kinds of restriction typical of LV2 languages.

Yet, under this account it remains unclear why Icelandic B should pattern with Mainland Scandinavian, given that its *Agr*-features seem to be as “active” (e.g. in triggering I°-to-C° and overt morphological spell-out) as the ones of

³ See Zwart (1997) for the general theoretical background of this kind of analysis.

⁴ Jónsson (1996), following Ottósson (1989), Rögnvaldsson and Thráinsson (1990), and Vikner (1994, 1995), assumes that both dialects of Icelandic disallow extraction from complements in which fronting of a non-subject plus subject - finite verb inversion (= “V2”) has taken place. Iatridou and Kroch (1992) present counterevidence to this. In this article, I’ll sidestep extraction phenomena. Likewise, I disregard embedded clauses containing a subject gap. I assume that these show properties to be accounted for independently (cf. Maling 1990; Rögnvaldsson and Thráinsson 1990). Finally, I won’t discuss narrative V1 clauses, the root nature of which seems to be much less controversial (cf. Sigurðsson 1990b).

Icelandic A.⁵ It seems that we must find another dimension along which Icelandic A and B differ such that the GV2/LV2 distinction can be derived. I suggest that for this purpose we have to revisit the contexts that are supposed to establish the GV2 nature of Icelandic A. It will turn out that not all of these are equally incompatible with the assumption that at least some of the restrictions on LV2 languages hold for Icelandic A as well. If this line of argumentation is correct, Icelandic B would look more Icelandic again, because Icelandic A looks somewhat less Icelandic than earlier thought.

Most accounts of embedded or dependent V2 clauses in LV2 languages have more or less directly relied on the fact that V2 is a prototypical root phenomenon in the sense of Hooper and Thompson (1973). Given this, its distribution should be related to illocutionary force (potential) as the main pragmatic characteristic of root clauses. Such a move is most straightforward in cases where some kind of paratactic analysis can be defended. As shown in Wechsler (1991), causal and concessive V2 clauses in Swedish can be taken to introduce an additional assertion rather than being properly subordinated and dependent on the force of their matrix clause. Consequently, these clauses systematically escape the scope of matrix negation, i.e. in the presence of matrix negation they induce a *not p, because q* reading, rather than *not (p, because q)* (cf. Wegener 1993; de Haan 2001). Curiously, the one “v/2 in an adverbial adjunct” presented in Iatridou and Kroch (1992: 8) in favor of the GV2 nature of Icelandic is such a causal adjunct, given in (2).

- (2) Ég hef áhyggjur af þessu af því að Maríu hefur hann aldrei séð.
 I have worries of this for it that Mary.ACC has he.NOM never seen
 ‘This worries me because Mary he has never seen.’

After inserting negation into the matrix, speakers of Icelandic A would have to be able to construe the result as saying that the speaker’s worries are not due to some male person’s never having seen Mary. From the discussion in Sigurðsson (1990a: 327) it is clear that scope may be influenced by choice of indicative over subjunctive mood in the adjunct clause, the latter forcing the adjunct into the scope of negation. If that turns out to be the case, we would have identified use of subjunctive as one of the potential sources for the Icelandic A/B split.⁶ As it stands, however, (2) is compatible with Icelandic A possessing at least some LV2 features.⁷

⁵ Holmberg and Platzack (1995, section 3.5) further predict that Icelandic B does not allow long distance anaphora into non-subject initial *að*+V2 complements.

⁶ The loss of subjunctive in Faroese would be a relevant object of comparison here.

⁷ The causal adjunct clause discussed in Jónsson (1996: 39, example (75)) is more difficult to reconcile with LV2 properties, since it is preposed. This is ruled out for its putative Swedish and German counterparts.

The approach to embedded V2 in terms of illocutionary force (potential) is less straightforward where V2 argument clauses are involved. First, removing the V2 clause under a paratactic analysis would leave the matrix clause incomplete. Standard remedies for this consist in postulating a variable in place of the V2 clause and/or giving the matrix clause a parenthetical analysis (cf. Hooper and Thompson 1973; Reis 1995, 1997). Secondly, a paratactic analysis would lift the dependent V2 clause out of the scope of the matrix to a position where it would be assigned an interpretation as speaker assertion. This, however, is often incorrect. Instead that assertion is systematically attributed to the “controller” of the matrix predicate, which in many cases is the individual denoted by the matrix subject. It is not entirely clear how this shift can be brought about without violating “embedded force exclusion” (EFE) (Green 2000), i.e. the traditional idea that action related categories cannot preserve their status when they are made an internal part of representations.⁸ One way, pursued in Krifka (2001), is to simply give up EFE. Another consists in giving up on full-fledged illocutionary force (potential) and appeal to a derivative notion, such as “mediate assertion” (Reis 1997). A meeting point of the two approaches may lie in an analysis of dependent V2 clauses as instances of “free indirect style” in the sense of stylistics (cf. Banfield 1973; Leech and Short 1981). This seems to be the line chosen by den Besten (1983) under the label of “conjunctive quotation”.⁹

What all of these approaches have in common is that they are, or purport to be, incompatible with the content of the dependent V2 clause being presupposed. This is why factive verbs like *regret* have played an important role in establishing the GV2 nature of Icelandic. Thus, Rögnvaldsson and Thráinsson (1990: 23) take the acceptability of (3) to go against the illocutionary approach.

- (3) Jón harmar að þessa bók skuli ég hafa lesið.
John regrets that this book should I have read
'John regrets that I have read this book.'

However, while Jónsson (1996: 37) simply rejects (3) for Icelandic B, another way of looking at this example would be to suggest that *regret* in (3) is more naturally given a “parenthetical interpretation”, as discussed for English in Urmson (1963). Such a shift is also typically available in LV2 languages like German. Under this view, *regret* contains an implicit “speech act component”

⁸ See the discussion of this Wittgensteinian idea in Stenius (1960, chapter 9).

⁹ Reis (1997) discusses some limitations of this method concerning predicates of mental attitude.

like “to inform x”. (3) would then report on a situation in which John regretfully informed the speaker that the latter should have read a certain book.¹⁰

Of course, other examples containing predicates like *doubt* (cf. Rögnvaldsson and Thráinsson 1990: 23) are not (readily) amenable to such an LV2 compatible reinterpretation.

Let me turn to degree word complements as an area of V2 licensing that deserves further comparative study.¹¹ Thus, my local informant – who may of course be a speaker of Icelandic B – reported the following contrast.

- (4) a. Jón var svo skítugur að fötin sín hefði hann helst strax sett í þvottavélina.
John was so dirty that clothes his had he rather quickly put in washing-machine.the
‘John was so dirty that he would rather have put his clothes into the washing machine immediately.’
- b. ?? Enginn_i var svo skítugur að fötin sín_i hefði hann_i helst strax sett í þvottavélina.
in washing-machine.the
‘Nobody was so dirty that he would rather have put his clothes into the washing machine immediately.’

This is the contrast typical of LV2 languages and thus another potential LV2 feature of Icelandic A. The extraposed degree word complement must be interpreted as a speaker assertion (cf. de Haan 2001), which is impossible if it gets into the scope of negation as required by the bound variable reading in (4b).

Finally, I would like to point out another curious fact about the GV2 evidence for Icelandic A. Thus, consider (5), which is discussed in Jónsson (1996: 39) and rejected for Icelandic B.

- (5) Ég ætla ekki að flytja til Reykjavíkur nema jörðina geti ég selt.
I am not to move to Reykjavik unless farm.the get I sold
‘I am not going to move to Reykjavik unless I can sell the farm.’

One way of transposing (5) into German would use the particle *außer* for *nema*, which, lo and behold, can combine with a V2 clause.

- (6) Ich ziehe nicht nach Reykjavik, außer ich kann den Hof verkaufen.
I move not to Reykjavik, unless I can the farm sell

¹⁰ This is the first interpretation my local informant came up with spontaneously. A deontic interpretation of *skuli* would seem to be preferred under such circumstances. A related hypothesis would be that the dimension of “admitting the truth of the complement” attributed in Sigurðsson (1990a: 325) to true factives contains the necessary amount of speech act orientation to license a V2 complement.

¹¹ See de Haan (2001) for an analysis of the Frisian facts.

(6) is likely to be paratactic in nature, given that *außer*+V2 cannot be preposed. Of course, the interpretation of *außer*+V2 as a negative conditional is hardly compatible with the illocutionary approach.¹² On the other hand, paratactic behavior of such particles is an independent property that clearly doesn't affect the general LV2 nature of German and thus couldn't establish the GV2 nature of Icelandic A either.

Now, although each of the issues I addressed above would deserve a lot of additional attention, not to speak of the issues I didn't address, I hope that the general line of argumentation has become clear.

So, let me finally raise the question as to how Icelandic you can be, if you speak Icelandic B? I have suggested that the answer depends on how many LV2 features Icelandic A might possess. The discovery of such features, as well as a deeper entrenchment of countervailing GV2 properties, will, I think, hinge on further (comparative) semantic and pragmatic research accompanying our quest for the nature of "embedded V2".

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¹² For some further study of its properties, see Abraham (1979).

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Gärtner: How Icelandic can you be ...?

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