

# Icelandic ditransitives and the object inversion construction

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## Abstract

In addition to the double object construction (DOC) with a goal-theme order and the prepositional dative construction (PDC), Icelandic also has what I will call the object inversion construction (OIC). In this construction, two objects of a ditransitive verb appear in a theme-goal order. The OIC is both highly infrequent and subject to syntactic, pragmatic and prosodic constraints that are specific to the OIC. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the OIC is a variant of the DOC and derived from a goal-theme base by short A-movement of the theme across the goal. The strongest argument for this analysis is the fact that verbs that occur in the OIC are a proper subset of the verbs found in the DOC. By contrast, there is no such correlation between the OIC and the PDC in Icelandic. Moreover, both the DOC and the OIC are subject to the well-known constraint that the goal must denote something capable of possession. Facts about anaphoric binding and passives also indicate that the goal argument in the OIC is a DP and not a PP headed by a null preposition.

Keywords: ditransitive, theme, goal, A-movement

## 1. Introduction

Studies show that many languages are like English in having two ditransitive constructions. These are generally referred to as the double object construction (DOC) and the prepositional dative construction (PDC). The DOC features two DPs where the goal precedes the theme whereas the PDC has a theme DP followed a goal PP.<sup>1</sup> One of these languages is Icelandic. As exemplified in (1) below, Icelandic also allows theme-goal orders with two objects, a construction that is known as Inversion. I will use the more specific term Object Inversion Construction (OIC) here to avoid confusion with other word order phenomena that have been labelled inversion.

- (1) a. *Ég sendi Sigríði myndina.* (DOC)  
I sent Sigríður.DAT picture.the.ACC  
'I sent Sigríður the picture.'
- b. *Ég sendi myndina til Sigríðar.* (PDC)  
I sent picture.the.ACC to Sigríður.GEN  
'I sent the picture to Sigríður.'
- c. *Ég sendi myndina Sigríði.* (OIC)  
I sent picture.the.ACC Sigríður.DAT  
'I sent Sigríður the picture.'

The OIC in Icelandic is always slightly degraded, especially if the inverted theme is a full DP rather than an unstressed pronoun. Still, in keeping with common practice in the literature, I will not mark examples of this kind in any way in this paper.

The main question about the OIC is whether it should be analysed as a variant of the DOC or the PDC or even as an independent construction that should be distinguished from the other

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<sup>1</sup> I will use the term goal here as a broad cover term in this paper for more specific semantic notions like recipient, benefactive and location.

two. Most work on the OIC has leaned towards a PDC-analysis (see Falk 1990, Holmberg & Platzack 1995, Collins & Thráinsson 1996 and Doggett 2004), with the notable exception of Ottósson (1991).<sup>2</sup> Still, none of these analyses are based on a systematic comparison of the OIC with the other ditransitive constructions in Icelandic of the kind that I will undertake here.

I will argue here that the OIC is a regular DOC with short A-scrambling of the theme argument across the goal argument (see also Haddican 2010 and Haddican & Holmberg 2012 on theme-goal orders in some British English dialects). The arguments for this analysis come from traditional diagnostics which distinguish the DOC from the PDC in addition to some language-specific facts. I will also argue that it is not possible to analyze the OIC as a DP-PP structure with a null preposition, which is the most natural implementation of a PDC-analysis for the OIC.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides some relevant background information about ditransitive constructions in Icelandic, especially the various restrictions on the OIC relating to syntax, pragmatics and prosody. The DOC-analysis of the OIC is presented and argued for in Section 3. Some further issues concerning the OIC, including two potential counter-arguments to the DOC-analysis of the OIC, are discussed in Section 4. The main points of the paper are summarized in Section 5.

## 2. Background

The DOC is clearly the canonical ditransitive construction in Icelandic as both the OIC and the PDC are heavily restricted. The restrictions on the latter construction are primarily due to the fact that the preposition *til* retains most of its locative semantics in the PDC in Icelandic, in contrast to what we find e.g. with English *to* (Thráinsson 2007:231-232). This is shown by two facts about the PDC in Icelandic discussed by Kristínardóttir (2021): (a) it works best with ditransitive verbs denoting transfer, and (b) it is most acceptable if the goal argument can be interpreted as some kind of a location. Thus, the goal preferably refers to an organization or an unspecified group of people rather than a particular person. This shows quite clearly that the DOC and the PDC are two different constructions in Icelandic that cannot be related derivationally.

There are various restrictions that hold of the OIC and they relate to verb class, pragmatics and prosody as summarized below (see also Ottósson 1991, Collins & Thráinsson 1996 and Jónsson 2020):

- (2) a. The OIC is only possible with DAT-ACC verbs, the biggest class of ditransitive verbs in Icelandic, and (some) DAT-DAT verbs.<sup>3</sup>
- b. The inverted theme in the OIC must denote old or given information.
- c. The OIC is most acceptable if the theme is an unstressed pronoun.
- d. The goal cannot be an unstressed pronoun.

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<sup>2</sup> Ussery (2018) treats the OIC as a base-generated variant of the DOC. On her analysis, the goal follows the theme by virtue of being a righthand specifier of ApplP (see also Bruening 2010). One problem with this analysis is that c-command must be abandoned as the relevant notion for binding and various other phenomena which show an asymmetry between the indirect and direct object in the DOC. It is also difficult under this view to make sense of the restrictions on the theme argument listed in (2).

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of all the classes of ditransitive verbs in Icelandic, see Jónsson (2000) and Maling (2002).

In addition to these restrictions, the OIC is incredibly rare in Icelandic (Dehé 2004). Thus, extensive searches in the Risamálheild Corpus indicate that the OIC is found in only about 1% of all examples with two DP objects with most ditransitive verbs in Icelandic (Jónsson 2020).

The restrictions listed above separate the OIC from both the DOC and the PDC. Hence, they do not clearly differentiate between the DOC-analysis and the PDC-analysis of the OIC. However, as emphasized by Ottósson (1991), these restrictions are indicative of movement of the theme as the DOC-analysis entails. For instance, Icelandic Object Shift, which moves pronominal and full DP objects across negation and sentential adverbs, is sensitive to discourse factors such that shifted objects must express old or presupposed information (Diesing 1996). Moreover, topicalization of objects in Icelandic has a clear contrastive function.

The theme argument asymmetrically c-commands the goal in both the PDC and the OIC. The structural relations between goal and theme are reversed in the DOC where the goal asymmetrically c-commands the theme. This can be seen e.g. with anaphoric binding as exemplified for the three ditransitive constructions in (3) – (5) below:<sup>4</sup>

- (3) a. *Ég sýndi eigandanum<sub>i</sub> hundinn sinn<sub>i</sub>.* (DOC)  
 I showed owner.the.DAT dog.the.ACC REFL.ACC  
 ‘I showed the owner his/her dog.’
- b. \**Ég sýndi eiganda sínum<sub>i</sub> hundinn<sub>i</sub>.*  
 I showed owner.DAT REFL.DAT dog.the.ACC  
 ‘I showed its owner the dog.’
- (4) a. *Ég sýndi hundinn<sub>i</sub> eiganda sínum<sub>i</sub>.* (OIC)  
 I showed dog.the.ACC owner.DAT REFL.DAT  
 ‘I showed the dog its owner.’
- b. \**Ég sýndi eiganda sinn<sub>i</sub> hundinum<sub>i</sub>.*  
 I showed owner.ACC REFL.ACC dog.the.DAT  
 ‘I showed its owner the dog.’
- (5) a. *Ég sendi börnin<sub>i</sub> til mömmu sinnar<sub>i</sub>.* (PDC)  
 I sent children.the.ACC to mother.GEN REFL.GEN  
 ‘I sent the children to their mother.’
- b. \**Ég sendi mömmu sína<sub>i</sub> til barnanna<sub>i</sub>.*  
 I sent mother.ACC REFL.ACC to children.the.GEN  
 ‘I sent the their mother to their children.’

These examples show that the first argument can bind into the second argument but not vice versa, irrespective of theta-role. Since the configuration associated with the OIC is the input to binding conditions, the hypothesized movement of the theme across the goal in the OIC is A-movement rather than A'-movement.

The binding data shown above distinguish theme-goal orders in the OIC from the same orders created by moving the goal to the right by Heavy NP Shift. This so because Heavy NP Shift does not affect binding possibilities in Icelandic (Rögnvaldsson 1982:133-135, Zaenen, Maling & Thráinsson 1985, Ottósson 1991 and Collins & Thráinsson 1996). Examples of

<sup>4</sup> Asymmetries between the two internal arguments of ditransitive verbs are also found in various other syntactic phenomena that are sensitive to c-command (see Barss & Lasnik 1986 for English).

Heavy NP Shift are also easily distinguished from the OIC when the direct object is indefinite and denotes new information because such cases violate the pragmatic condition (2b) on the OIC:

- (6) a. Hún gaf bók öllum þeim sem sýndu þessu áhuga.  
 she gave book.ACC all.DAT those.DAT who showed this interest  
 ‘She gave a book to all those who showed an interest in this.’
- b. ?? Hún gaf bók öllum í námskeiðinu.  
 she gave book.ACC all.DAT in course.the  
 ‘She gave a book to everyone in the course.’
- c. \* Hún gaf bók öllum.  
 she gave book.ACC all.DAT  
 ‘She gave a book to everyone.’

As shown here, the acceptability of an indefinite theme before the goal decreases as the goal becomes lighter and an analysis in terms of Heavy NP Shift becomes less plausible. Thus, (6c) is ungrammatical as this example can only be analyzed as an example of the OIC.

### 3. The DOC-analysis

This chapter presents evidence for the DOC-analysis of the OIC. Under this analysis, the OIC involves two DPs where the theme moves across the goal to a higher position within vP. I will remain agnostic about the landing site; one possibility is the outer specifier of ApplP as in the Anagnostopoulou's (2003) analysis of the derivation of theme-passives in Norwegian and Swedish.<sup>5</sup> As I will argue in more detail below, there are ample reasons to prefer this analysis to the PDC-analysis of the OIC even though the latter has been more popular in the literature on the OIC in Icelandic.

A PDC-analysis of theme-goal orders usually takes the form of a DP-PP structure where the goal argument is introduced by a null preposition. However, the most detailed PDC-analysis of the OIC to date is due to Holmberg & Platzack (1995), who postulate a base-generated theme-goal order with two DPs. They claim that this is a PDC-analysis but it seems rather that they treat the OIC as an independent constructions. Be that as it may, the main advantage of this analysis is that it is immune to the problems discussed below that relate to the goal in the OIC as a PP hosting a null preposition. The PDC-analysis of the OIC does not involve any movement of the theme and this is probably its main attraction. Instead, this analysis makes use of a structure that is independently attested for ditransitive verbs across languages, including Icelandic.

The problem with the PDC-analysis is that the OIC has very little in common with the PDC. By contrast, the OIC shares many important properties with the DOC, i.e. goal-theme orders with two DP objects, and this will be discussed in more detail below.

#### 3.1 The DOC and the OIC vs. the PDC

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, Ottósson (1991) notes that no adverb can intervene between the theme and the goal in the OIC. This is expected if the theme and the goal are specifiers of the same projection.

A well-known fact about ditransitive constructions in English is that the goal may denote a location in the PDC whereas the goal in the DOC must denote something capable of possession (see Green 1974:103-104). The same holds for Icelandic as shown by the contrast between (7a) and (7b) below. Importantly, the OIC patterns with the DOC in this respect as can be seen in (7c):

- (7) a. Hún sendi þakkann til Kópavogs. (PDC)  
 she sent parcel.the.ACC to Kópavogur.GEN  
 ‘She sent the parcel to Kópavogur.’
- b. \* Hún sendi Kópavogi þakkann. (DOC)  
 she sent Kópavogi.DAT parcel.the.ACC  
 ‘She sent the parcel to Kópavogur.’
- c. \* Hún sendi þakkann Kópavogi. (OIC)  
 she sent parcel.the.ACC Kópavogur.DAT  
 ‘She sent the parcel to Kópavogur.’

This is a strong indication that there is no hidden preposition in the OIC because this preposition would presumably be the null counterpart of the overt preposition *til* or at least another suitable directional preposition. Note also that *til* assigns genitive case to its object whereas the goal bears dative case, both in the DOC and the OIC. This is surprising under the PDC-analysis because it is hard to see why the covert preposition assigns dative case since directional prepositions generally take accusative objects in Icelandic.<sup>6</sup> This can be seen e.g. with the preposition *á* ‘on’ in Icelandic, which is sometimes used like the English preposition *to* with ditransitive verbs as in the following examples:

- (8) a. Ég sendi þennan tölvupóst á alla.  
 I sent this.ACC e-mail.ACC on everyone.ACC  
 ‘I sent this e-mail to everybody.’
- b. Allir vildu gefa boltann á hana.  
 everyone wanted give ball.the.ACC on her.ACC  
 ‘Everybody wanted to pass the ball to her.’

The most striking similarity between the OIC and the DOC is that verbs that occur in the former construction are a proper subset of the verbs found in the latter construction. In other words, every verb which allows the OIC also displays a regular goal-theme order but not vice versa. By contrast, there is no such correlation between the OIC and the PDC. Thus, there are various ditransitive verbs in Icelandic that freely allow the DOC as well as the OIC but not the PDC. One of these verbs is *sýna* ‘show’:

- (9) a. Ég vildi sýna konunni borðið. (DOC)  
 I wanted show woman.the.DAT table.the.ACC

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<sup>6</sup> One could argue that the null preposition assigns dative case because it always takes a recipient object, as shown by the ungrammaticality of (7c). However, this would not be consistent with the PDC-analysis of the OIC because the PDC involves directional prepositions.

‘I wanted to show the woman the table.’

- b. Ég vildi sýna borðið konunni. (OIC)  
I wanted show table.the.ACC woman.the.DAT  
‘I wanted to show the woman the table.’
- c. \* Ég vildi sýna borðið til konunnar. (PDC)  
I wanted show table.the.ACC to woman.the.GEN  
‘I wanted to show the table to the woman.’

It is easy to find other ditransitive verbs in Icelandic that pattern like *sýna* by excluding the PDC but allowing the DOC and the OIC, e.g. the verbs *kenna* ‘teach’ and *bjóða* ‘offer’:

- (10) a. María kenndi nemendum kvæðið. (DOC)  
Mary taught students.the.DAT poem.the.ACC  
‘Mary taught the students the poem.’
- b. María kenndi kvæðið nemendum. (OIC)  
Mary taught poem.the.ACC students.the.DAT  
‘Mary taught the students the poem.’
- c. \* María kenndi kvæðið til nemendanna. (PDC)  
Mary taught poem.the.ACC to students.the.GEN  
‘Mary taught the poem to the students.’
- (11) a. Sara bauð Sveini starfið. (DOC)  
Sara offered Sveinn.the.DAT job.the.ACC  
‘Sara offered Sveinn the job.’
- b. Sara bauð starfið Sveini. (OIC)  
Sara offered job.the.ACC Sveinn.DAT  
‘Sara offered Sveinn the job.’
- c. \* Sara bauð starfið til Sveins. (PDC)  
Sara offered job.the.ACC to Sveinn.GEN  
‘Sara offered the job to Sveinn.’

The starred examples in (9c), (10c) and (11c) reflect my own judgments but the corpus data collected by Kristínardóttir (2021:26) show that the verbs *sýna*, *kenna* and *bjóða* are among the ditransitive verbs in Icelandic that are least frequent in the PDC.

In contrast to verbs that are compatible with the DOC and the OIC but not the PDC, there are verbs that show the opposite pattern and permit only the PDC. Verbs of throwing are probably the best examples of this kind in Icelandic. As Barðdal (2007) observes, such verbs do not license two objects in Icelandic, although this is possible in English (e.g. *He threw me the ball*). Crucially, this restriction holds for both the DOC and the OIC:

- (12) a. Hún kastaði/henti/sparkaði boltanum til barnsins. (PDC)  
she threw/threw/kicked ball.the.DAT to child.the.GEN

‘She threw/kicked the ball to the child.’

- b. \* Hún kastaði/henti/sparkaði barninu boltanum. (DOC)  
she threw/threw/kicked child.the.DAT ball.the.DAT  
‘She threw/kicked the ball to the child.’
- c. \* Hún kastaði/henti/sparkaði boltanum barninu. (OIC)  
she threw/threw/kicked ball.the.DAT child.the.DAT  
‘She threw/kicked the ball to the child.’

Note also that the ungrammaticality of (12c) cannot be attributed to the double dative because examples like (12c) are clearly much worse than examples of the OIC with verbs taking two dative objects.

Another argument in favor of the DOC-analysis comes from traditional passives without DP-movement. As shown in (13a), an indefinite theme can stay in its base position in the PDC. However, moving neither object by DP-movement is excluded in Icelandic (Holmberg 2002), whether the order is goal-theme or theme-goal, as shown in (13b-c).

- (13) a. Það voru sendir pakkar til barnanna. (PDC)  
there were sent parcels.NOM to children.the.GEN  
‘Parcels were sent to the children.’
- b. \* Það voru sendir börnunum pakkar. (DOC)  
there were sent children.the.DAT parcels.NOM  
‘Parcels were sent to the children.’
- c. \* Það voru sendir pakkar börnunum. (OIC)  
there were sent parcels.NOM children.the.DAT  
‘Parcels were sent to the children.’

Under the PDC-analysis of the OIC, it is surprising that (13a) is perfect but (13c) is ungrammatical because both examples have the same DP-PP structure. Of course, one could argue that the problem in (13c) is that the inverted theme must fulfill two contradictory requirements: (i) the definiteness restriction found in passives without DP-movement, and (ii) the requirement that the theme in the OIC must denote old or given information. However, this does not quite work because the active counterpart of (13c) is somewhat better than (13c):<sup>7</sup>

- (14) ?? Einhver sendi pakka börnunum.  
someone sent parcels.ACC children.the.DAT  
‘Someone sent parcels to the children.’

The contrast is subtle but it suggests nevertheless that there is some additional factor that makes the difference between (13c) and (14). Under the DOC-analysis of the OIC, this is the fact that the OIC involves two DPs and ditransitive passives are excluded in Icelandic if neither DP undergoes DP-movement.

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<sup>7</sup> Note that (6c) is starred even though it looks comparable to (14). For me, (6c) is worse than (14) and the reason seems to be that the theme is monosyllabic in (6c) but disyllabic in (14). At the moment, I have no good explanation for this prosodic effect.

The final argument to be discussed in this section concerns anaphoric binding. As shown below, the goal argument can be the antecedent of a reflexive in the DOC and the OIC but not in the PDC:

- (15) a. ? Ég sendi Siggu<sub>i</sub> það á afmælinu sínu<sub>i</sub>. (DOC)  
 I sent Sigga.DAT it.ACC on birthday REFL  
 ‘I sent it to Sigga on her birthday.’
- b. ? Ég sendi það Siggu<sub>i</sub> á afmælinu sínu<sub>i</sub>. (OIC)  
 I sent it.ACC Sigga.DAT on birthday REFL  
 ‘I sent it to Sigga on her birthday.’
- c. \* Ég sendi það til Siggu<sub>i</sub> á afmælinu sínu<sub>i</sub>. (PDC)  
 I sent it.ACC to Sigga.GEN on birthday REFL  
 ‘I sent it to Sigga on her birthday.’

It is better to use a pronominal in (15a-b) rather than a reflexive possessive to refer to the goal argument. Still, the contrast between (15a-b) vs. (15c) is clear, at least for speakers like myself that allow object antecedents of reflexives. Moreover, this contrast follows from standard binding theory since objects of prepositions do not c-command anything outside of the relevant PP.<sup>8</sup>

## 4. Potential counterarguments

In this chapter I will review two arguments that have been advanced in support of the PDC-analysis of the OIC in Icelandic. As we will see, an alternative analysis is possible in both cases that does not favor the PDC-analysis over the DOC-analysis.

### 4.1 Light verbs

Holmberg & Platzack (1995) provide an argument in support of their PDC-analysis of the OIC based on examples where no transfer is expressed as the ditransitive verb is a light verb with a purely causative meaning. Holmberg & Platzack (1995) observe that the OIC patterns with the PDC in being ungrammatical in such examples:<sup>9</sup>

- (16) a. Þetta gaf nokkrum bændum þessa hugmynd. (DOC)  
 this gave few.DAT farmers.DAT this.ACC idea.ACC  
 ‘This gave a few farmers this idea.’ (Holmberg & Platzack 1995:208)
- b. \* Þetta gaf þessa hugmynd nokkrum bændum. (OIC)  
 this gave this.ACC idea.ACC few.DAT farmers.DAT  
 ‘This gave a few farmers this idea.’ (Holmberg & Platzack 1995:208)

<sup>8</sup> Objects of prepositions in Icelandic are at least marginally acceptable as antecedents of reflexives in some cases but they need not concern us here.

<sup>9</sup> Holmberg & Platzack (1995) use an example from Swedish to show that the PDC is excluded here but I prefer to use an Icelandic example here for this purpose.

- c. \* Þetta gaf þessa hugmynd til nokkurra bænda. (PDC)  
 this gave this.ACC idea.ACC to few.GEN farmers.GEN  
 ‘This gave a few farmers this idea.’

Holmberg & Platzack (1995) take the ungrammaticality of (16b) and (16c) to show that the OIC is a variant of the PDC. They claim that the second internal argument in both constructions is a pure experiencer and thus must be generated in a higher position than the theme as required by the thematic hierarchy.<sup>10</sup>

This argumentation can be disputed on at least two grounds. First, I think that (16b) is more acceptable than (16c), although it is clearly worse than (16a). Hence, the OIC does not behave exactly like the PDC in this case. Second, since the verb *gefa* ‘give’ is used as a light verb here, the theme does not behave syntactically like a true argument even though it is definite and denotes old information.<sup>11</sup> As exemplified below, the theme can neither be pronominalized nor moved by topicalization or wh-movement.<sup>12</sup>

- (17) a. \* ...og þetta gaf sjómönnum hana líka.  
 ...and this gave sailors.DAT her.ACC also  
 ‘This gave sailors it too.’
- b. \* Þessa hugmynd gaf þetta nokkrum bændum.  
 this.ACC idea.ACC gave this few.DAT farmers.DAT  
 ‘This idea, this gave a few farmers.’
- c. \* Hvaða hugmynd gaf þetta nokkrum bændum?  
 which.ACC idea.ACC gave this few.DAT farmers.DAT  
 ‘Which idea did this give a few farmers?’

Passivization is not possible either, whether the theme or the goal moves by DP-movement to the subject position, but this will not be shown here in the interest of space.

Since the theme cannot undergo wh-movement or topicalization in examples like (16a), it should not be able to move across the goal to create the theme-goal order found in the OIC. Hence, the problem that examples like (16b) pose for the DOC-analysis of the OIC reduces to a more general problem of moving the theme in examples where the ditransitive verb is a light causative verb. The conclusion is that examples like (16b) do not support the PDC-analysis of the OIC. In fact, in view of the data in (17a-c), the example in (16b) can be taken as an argument that the theme moves across the goal as the DOC-analysis entails.

## 4.2 Double Object Shift

Collins & Thráinsson (1996) claim that when Object Shift (OS) applies to both objects of a ditransitive verb only the canonical goal-theme order is possible. The inverted order theme-goal is excluded:<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> In addition to (16a-b), Holmberg & Platzack (1995:208) provide another minimal pair that is supposed to illustrate the same point. I will not discuss these examples here because I think they are not comparable to (16a-b) and also fail to show a clear contrast between the DOC and the OIC.

<sup>11</sup> See Kearns (2002) for an overview of the syntactic properties of light verb constructions in English and Brueing (2015) for discussion of ditransitive light verbs.

<sup>12</sup> Note that (17a) should be read as a potential continuation of (16a).

<sup>13</sup> In order to avoid unnecessary complications, I will restrict attention here to cases where the two objects are full DPs.

- (18) a. ? Ég lána Maríu bækurnar ekki. (goal-theme)  
 I lend Mary.DAT books.the.ACC not  
 ‘I do not lend Mary the books.’ (Collins & Thráinsson 1996:409)
- b. \* Ég lána bækurnar Maríu ekki. (theme-goal)  
 I lend books.the.ACC Mary.DAT not  
 ‘I do not lend the books to Mary.’ (Collins & Thráinsson 1996:409)

Anagnostopoulou (2003:120-122) argues that this contrast follows from the PDC-analysis of the OIC because PPs do not undergo OS. If the goal was a DP, shifting the goal from an OIC structure should be possible, at least under certain theoretical assumptions about double OS combined with Richards' (1997) approach to parallel movement. This analysis entails that the status of (18b) should be the same as (19) where both an object and a PP move by OS:

- (19) \* Ég lána bækurnar til Maríu ekki. (PDC)  
 I lend books.the.ACC to Mary.GEN not  
 ‘I do not lend the books to Mary.’

This view can be challenged on empirical grounds since I disagree with the judgments reported in (18). I find the contrast between (18a) and (18b) to be rather weak and merely reflect the fact that a goal-theme order is (almost) always preferable to the opposite order, independent of OS. By contrast, (19) is clearly ungrammatical. In fact, Thráinsson (2007), in an apparent reversal of his earlier judgments, claims that double OS with a theme-goal order is acceptable in Icelandic with verbs that occur in the OIC, just as a goal-theme order:

- (20) a. Þau sýndu börnunum foreldrana aldrei. (goal-theme)  
 they showed children.the.DAT parents.the.ACC never  
 ‘They never showed the parents to the children.’ (Thráinsson 2007:138)
- b. Þau sýndu foreldrana börnunum aldrei. (theme-goal)  
 they showed parents.the.ACC children.the.DAT never  
 ‘They never showed the parents to the children.’ (Thráinsson 2007:139)

My intuition about these examples is the same as with (18a) vs. (18b): The goal-theme order in (20a) is somewhat better than the theme-goal order in (20b). Thus, I think there is no argument here for the PDC-analysis of the OIC. Note also that double OS with two full DPs is always degraded compared to examples where only one DP moves by OS but this is independent of the relative order of goal and theme and does not affect my argumentation here.

## 5. Summary

The canonical ditransitive construction in Icelandic is the double object construction (DOC) where two objects appear in the order goal-theme but the prepositional dative construction (PDC) is also possible to some extent. In addition, Icelandic has the object inversion construction (OIC) featuring two objects in a theme-goal order. Since the OIC is both highly infrequent and constrained in various ways that are specific to this constructions, it is not immediately obvious whether the OIC should be analysed as an independent construction or a variant of the DOC or the PDC. As discussed in this paper, it can be argued that the OIC is derived from the DOC by short A-movement of the theme across the goal. The strongest

argument for this analysis comes from the fact that verbs that occur in the OIC are a proper subset of the verbs found in the DOC. By contrast, there is no such correlation between the OIC and the PDC in Icelandic. Moreover, both the DOC and the OIC, in clear contrast to the PDC, are subject to the well-known constraint that the goal must denote something capable of possession. Further evidence for this analysis comes from facts about anaphoric binding and passives which suggest that the goal argument in the OIC is not a PP headed by a null preposition.

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