



# 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
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- **Development in real time and predictions for the future**
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  - 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 löggunum) (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 löggunum) (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(sg.) arrested(n.sg.) the-anarchists(A.m.pl.def.)
- c. \*það var **anarkistana** handtekið.  
there was(sg.) 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. (√NIP/√ExplCanP B)  
 there was(sg.) released(n.sg.) some anarchists(D.m.pl.)
- b. Það var sleppt **anarkistunum**. (√NIP/?\*ExplCanP B)  
 there was(sg.) released(n.sg.) the-anarchists(N.m.pl.def.)
- 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):

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

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. Bjórinna er búinn.  
 the-beer(N.m.sg.def.) is finished(m.sg.)

b. Það er búinn **bjórinna**.  
 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.)



## The Origin..., 3

- The Eventive (explanatory) Expletive (cf. Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson 1984:365, Halldór 1989:294ff.):

(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.'



## The Origin..., 4

- The Eventive Expletive PP (cf. Halldór 2011:173):

- (1) a. (?)Kertin slokknuðu.  
the-candles(N.n.pl.) went-out(pl.)  
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. Það langaði **marga íbúa** heim.  
 there longed(**sg.**) many residents(**A.m.pl.**) home  
 ‘Many (of the) residents wanted to go home.’

b. Það 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

- The Impersonal Passive (cf. M&S, S&M; Halldór & Egerland 2009:166ff., Halldór 2011:148ff.):

- (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 Origin..., 6

- The Impersonal Passive, condt.:

- M&S (2012:256): So-called “impersonal passives” are ambiguous:

- a. [e]                    [VP *var dansað*]                    Impersonal Passive
- b. [pro<sub>arb</sub>]            [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 synyntactically 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

(The by-phrase, binding and control facts are perhaps not as straightforward as originally assumed by M&S, cf. Thráinsson 2007:282, Thórhallur Eythórsson 2008, Jóhannes Gísli Jónsson 2009, Einar Freyr Sigurðsson 2012, Einar Freyr and Brynhildur Stefánsdóttir 2014. For some replies see M&S 2012.)



# The Origin..., 7

- Halldór (2011): The NIP is just like the prepositional Impers.Pass., except with an empty preposition:

(1) a.	það	var	talað	[ <sub>PP</sub> [ <sub>P</sub> við ]	<b>strákana</b> ]	í gær.
	there	was	talked	to	the-boys(A)	yesterday
b.	það	var	hitt	[ <sub>PP</sub> [ <sub>P</sub> Ø ]	<b>strákana</b> ]	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

- Ambiguous Expletive Passives (cf. Thórhallur Eythórsson 2008:211-212, cf. also Anton Karl Ingason, Legate and Yang 2012):

- (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

- The Reflexive Passive (cf. Halldór 1989:355n, S&M, M&S, Þórhallur 2008, Hlíf Árnadóttir et al. 2011):

- (1) a. Fólk dreif sig á ball.  
 people hurried REFL to dance
- b. Það **var drifið sig** á ball. RefIP  
 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. DiRefIP  
 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 kjaft.  
 people tore mouth = 'People were shooting their mouth off.'
- b. \*Það var rifinn kjaftur.  
 there was torn(m.sg.) mouth(N.m.sg.)
- c. (?)Það var rifið kjaft.  
 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)





# The Origin..., 12

## 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?

# The Origin..., 13

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 **vöruferðin**.  
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!

# Origin..., 14

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):

The argument cannot undergo (short) NP-movement. Examples (from M&S 2002:117, Legate 2014:87 (who calls the NIP “object passive”)):

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

# Origin..., 15

- 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 **bjórin** / \*Það er **bjórin** búinn.  
there is finished the-beer / there is the-beer finished
  - b. Það hafði bilað **bílinn** / \*Það hafði **bílinn** 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 **einvern strákur** barið.  
there was some boy(A.m.sg.) beaten(n.sg.)



# Origin..., 16

- 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:

(1) a. \*Það var hringt [<sub>PP</sub> [<sub>P</sub> í] Maríu<sub>i</sub>] úr símanum sínum<sub>i</sub>.  
there was called to Mary from phone REFL-poss

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

b. ??Það var barið [<sub>PP</sub> [<sub>P</sub> Ø] Maríu<sub>i</sub>] með dúkkunni sinni<sub>i</sub>.  
there was hit(n.sg.) Mary(A.f.sg.) with doll-the REFL-poss  
'Somebody hit Mary with her (own) doll.'





# Previous research on the diffusion of the NIP

Joan Maling and Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir 1999–2000 (S&M 2001, M&S 2002):

- 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

Finnur Friðriksson after 2000 (cf. FF 2008, 2011):

- 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.)

percentages	16–20	21-65	66+	total
% NIP out of all passive examples	6,3	2,9	0	2.6% (13 out of 494)
% of speakers producing some NIP	26,7	10	0	

### 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

## Intermezzo: Age grading, apparent time, real time, etc.

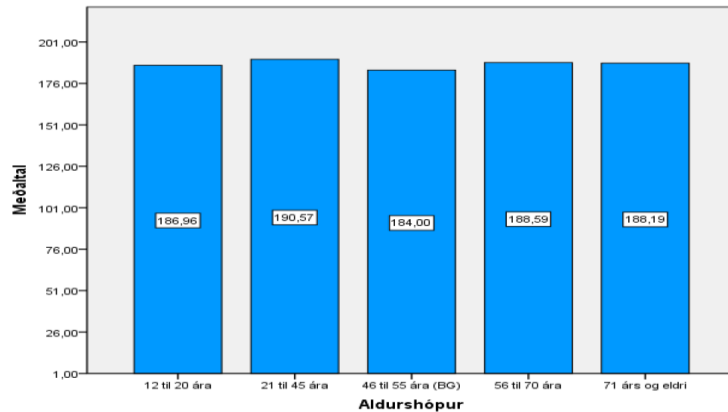


Figure 1

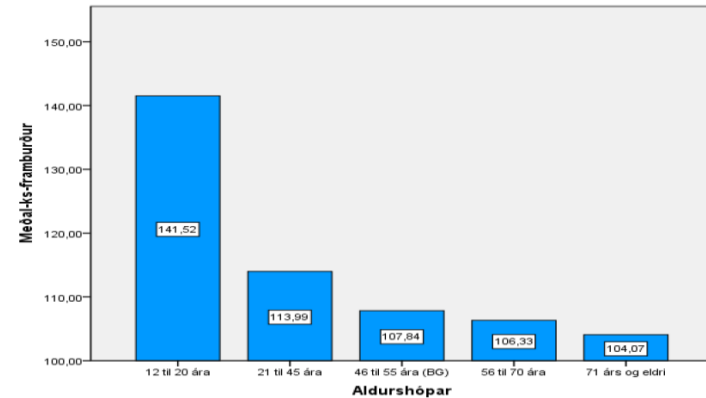


Figure 2

- 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”?



## Intermezzo, 2

Possible interpretations of figures like 1 and 2 (cf. e.g. Labov 2001a:83; Sankoff and Blondeau 2007:562–563):

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

**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.



## Intermezzo, 3

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 an 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)



## Previous research..., 4

### Typical format of the written questionnaire:

Settu X í viðeigandi dálk:

‘Put an X in the appropriate column.’

- já** = **Eðlileg** setning. Svona get ég vel sagt.  
 ‘yes’ ‘Natural sentence. I could easily say this.’
- ?** = **Vafasöm** setning. Ég myndi varla segja svona.  
 ‘Doubtful sentence. I could hardly say this.’
- nei** = **Ótæk** setning. Svona get ég ekki sagt.  
 ‘No’ ‘Impossible sentence. I could not say this.’

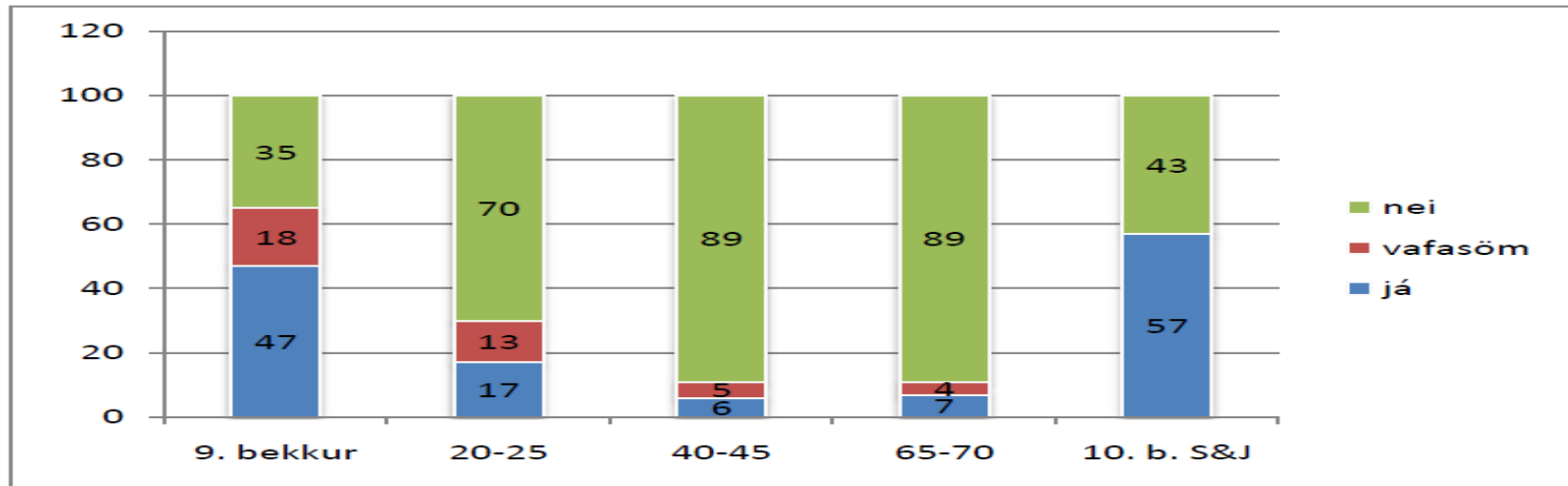
		já	?	nei	Athugasemdir ‘Comments’
V76	Ég get ekki komið í kvöld. ‘I cannot come tonight.’ Það var beðið mig að passa krakkana. “There was asked me to look-after the children”				



## Previous research..., 5

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.*





# Previous research..., 6

## 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:

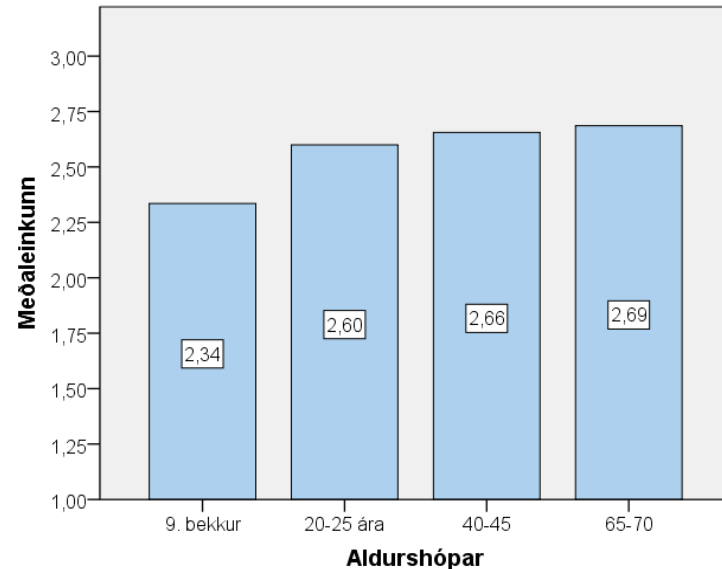
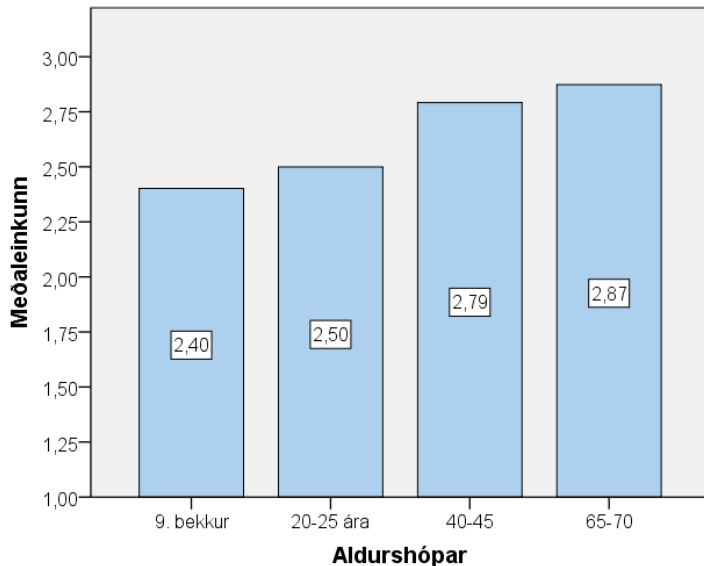


Figure 4: Indefinite inalienable possession  
(*hár hennar* vs. *hárið hennar*)

Figure 5: Agreement with Nom. object

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



## Previous research, 8

### 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.  
there was chased(n.sg.) the-man(N.m.sg.def.) out of the-place  
'Therefore the man was kicked out from the place.'
- b. Þess vegna var skammað **formanninn** á fundinum.  
therefore was scolded(n.sg.) the-chairman(A.m.sg.def.) at the meeting  
'Therefore the chairman was scolded at the meeting.'
- c. Það var málað **húsið** að utan  
there was painted(n.sg.) the-house(N/A.n.sg.def.) on the outside  
og skipt um þak.  
and changed about roof  
'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



## Previous research..., 9

Evaluation of the non-ambiguous NIC examples vs. the ambiguous one in IceDiaSyn:

#	Example	yes		?		No	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
(1a)	Það var rekið manninn ...	138	18	77	10	552	72
(1b)	Þess vegna var skammað formannin ...	159	20,7	72	9,4	537	69,9
(1c)	Það var málað húsið ...	248	<b>32,4</b>	142	<b>18,5</b>	376	<b>49,1</b>

So it appears that some speakers allow the ExplCanP interpretation of the potentially ambiguous c-example.

# Previous research..., 10

## 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. (ObsExpl)  
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. (RefIP)  
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 stærðfræðina. (ExtProg)  
he is just not to understand the-math  
'He just isn't understanding the math.'

# Previous research..., 11

Correlations between judgments of selected constructions in IceDiaSyn:

	ObsExpl (def.subj.)		ExplCanP (def.subj.)		Mean RefIP		Mean ExtProg	
Mean NIP	r .246	p .000	r .360	p .000	<b>r .625</b>	p .000	r .325	p .000

*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 RefIP — and there is an “acceptability hierarchy of passives”:

ImpersP > MonotransRefIP > DitransRefIP > 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.

## RAUN, 2

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





# RAUN, 3

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?



# RAUN, 4

## 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



# RAUN, 5

- 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**?

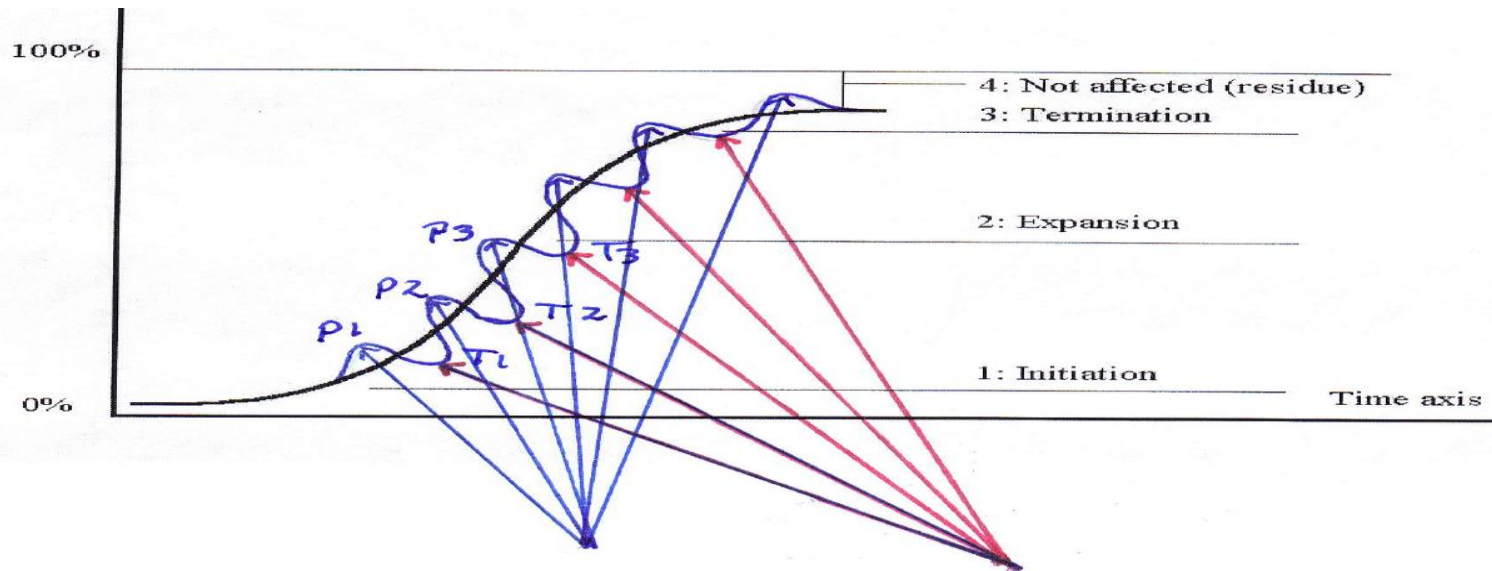


## RAUN, 6

### Adolescent peak and the S-curve:

- It has often been observed that linguistic innovations are “most popular” among **adolscents** (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:



Adolescent peaks      Post-adolescent troughs

*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 ...



# RAUN, 8

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**.



# RAUN, 9

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

The goals of Anton Karl Ingason, Legate and Yang (2012:91–92):

- To present “a mathematical model of the evolutionary trajectory of the Icelandic New Passive” based on Yang’s (2002) Variational Model (2002) which “derives the S-shaped curve of change from a hypothesized language acquisition mechanism” based on the idea of “grammar competition” (cf. e.g. Kroch 1989, 2001).
- 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]



## Future..., 2

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 ...)



## Future..., 3

### 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:

(9) a. Barnið var lamið.  
the.child.NOM/ACC was beaten  
'The child was beaten' (✓CP, ✓NP)

b. Það var lamið barnið.  
there was beaten the.child.NOM/ACC  
'The child was beaten' (\*CP, ✓NP)

- 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)



## The Future..., 4

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).



## The Future..., 5

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.**”



## The Future ..., 6

### 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.

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