Verb classes and dative objects
in Insular Scandinavian*

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It is well-known cross-linguistically that some classes of transitive verbs are more likely than others to have dative objects. Thus, verbs whose object participant is active independent of the actions of the subject participant have a strong tendency to take dative objects. In this article, I show how this is reflected in the Insular Scandinavian languages, especially Faroese, where verbs whose objects are furthest away from the dative prototype have been the prime targets of dative loss with two-place verbs. By contrast, verbs that are semantically closest to the dative prototype seem to be the most resistant to dative loss.

1. Introduction

Dative case in Insular Scandinavian (Icelandic and Faroese) exemplifies a fairly complicated relation between syntax and lexical semantics. Thus, monotransitive verbs selecting dative objects in Icelandic fall into various semantic classes and many of these classes also contain verbs with accusative objects (Maling 2002). The same is true of Faroese although the number of two-place dative verbs in that language is much smaller than in Icelandic. The reason is that dative objects of many verbs have been replaced by accusative objects in the history Faroese and this process is still ongoing.

Despite the complexities surrounding dative case selection in Insular Scandinavian, it is clear that some lexical semantic features are more strongly associated with dative case than others. This is also true cross-linguistically as can be seen by comparing two-place dative verbs across languages. Blume (1998) claims that there is a strong

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cross-linguistic tendency for verbs to take dative objects if they denote events in which
the object participant is active independent of the actions of the subject participant. The
object of such verbs, labelled interaction verbs by Blume (1998), does not have any
proto-patient properties such as being created, affected or manipulated by the subject
participant. Verbs of this kind include the Icelandic dative verbs fylgja 'follow', heilsa
'greet', hjálpa 'help' and samsinna 'agree with'. For convenience, we can refer to verbs
like these as prototypical dat-verbs.

The relevance of lexical semantics for the selection of dative objects can also be
seen in the historical development of two-place verbs, e.g., in a language like Faroese
that is in the process of losing dative objects. In such a language more resistance to
dative loss is expected, the more the object behaves like an active participant in the
event denoted by the verb and the fewer patient properties it displays. I will show with
numerous examples that this expectation is borne out, using data from Faroese as well
as comparative evidence from Icelandic.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides some background infor-
mation on dative loss in Faroese, both concerning the historical evidence for this
change and the wider context of dative loss in Faroese. Section 3 presents an overview
of monotransitive dat-verbs in Icelandic, followed by a more detailed discussion of
motion verbs and change-of-state verbs. Monotransitive dat-verbs in Faroese are the
topic of Section 4 where it is argued that dative loss has mostly affected verbs whose
objects display proto-patient properties, i.e., motion verbs and change-of-state verbs.
This section concludes with a brief discussion of the use of PPs for dative indirect
objects. Finally, the main conclusions of the paper are summarized in Section 5.

2. Some basic facts about dative loss

2.1 Historical sources

For lack of written sources before 1800, it is difficult to determine when dative objects
started to disappear in Faroese, but clear examples of this change are already attested
in the Faroese ballads which were composed in the period 1400–1800. For instance,
the verb kasta 'throw' is found with both dative (1a) and accusative (1b) objects in the
ballads whereas dative is obsolete with this verb in Modern Faroese (2a), except for a
few idiomatic expressions (see Thráinsson et al. 2004:430).

1. The abbreviation Hamm. refers (here and elsewhere) to Hammershimb's (1891) Færøsk
Anthologi. Volume I of that work contains texts and a grammar but volume II is a dictionary
of Faroese.
(1) a. Sjúrður kastar reyðum skildri niður á dökka fold (Hamm. II., 145)
'Sjúrður throws a red shield to the dark ground'

b. Kastar hann svørð og herklæði (Hamm. II., 145)
'He throws his sword and his armour'

(2) a. *Tað var Viktoria, sum kastaði steininum
'It was Victoria who threw the stone'

b. Tað var Viktoria, sum kastaði steinin
'It was Victoria who threw the stone'

Since kasta is a very common verb in Faroese, there are numerous examples with kasta in the ballads, both with dative and accusative objects. I have e.g., found more than twenty examples in the first volume of Hammershaimb (1891). Hence, there is very strong evidence within Faroese for dative loss with that particular verb. Unfortunately, this state of affairs seems to be the exception rather than the rule. For many monotransitive verbs in Faroese, the main evidence for dative loss is comparison to Old Icelandic, on the natural assumption that Old Icelandic gives a very good indication of the original object case for individual verbs in Faroese. For other verbs, there is no historical evidence at all about the original object case in Faroese. If Faroese and Icelandic differ with respect to object case with such verbs, no firm conclusions can be drawn about the directionality of the change.

The uncertainty in the dating and authenticity of individual ballads makes it nearly impossible to determine the finer details of dative loss in the history of Faroese. Thus, I will not attempt to describe anything more than the basic outlines of dative loss with two-place verbs. Still, it is quite clear that the domain of dative case selection has shrunk significantly in Faroese and supporting evidence for that can also be found in older stages of the other Scandinavian languages (see Reinhammar 1973 and references cited there). The fact that Modern Icelandic has far more monotransitive dat-verbs than Modern Faroese is also a clear indication of dative loss in Faroese (see Sections 3 and 4 below).

2.2 An overview of dative loss

The main focus of this paper is on monotransitive dat-verbs in Insular Scandinavian. Nevertheless, it is useful to see how the development of dat-verbs in Faroese compares
to dative loss in general. An overview of the history of datives in Modern Faroese is provided in (3):

(3) The development of various classes of datives in Faroese
   a. adjuncts (e.g., in comparatives)       lost
   b. theme/patient subjects of verbs       lost
   c. subjects of adjectives                lost
   d. subjects of passives^2               disappearing
   e. experiencer subjects of verbs^3      disappearing
   f. direct objects of verbs               losing ground
   g. indirect objects of verbs             well preserved
   h. objects of prepositions              well preserved

Dative objects of adjectives are not included in this overview because I have very little information about them. Henriksen (2004: 71) lists various adjectives that take dative objects in Faroese. Some of these adjectives are commonly used with dative objects in Modern Faroese, e.g., likur ‘similar to’ and ólikur ‘dissimilar from’, but others usually take PP complements, e.g., trúgvur ‘faithful to’ and skaðiligur ‘harmful to’ (Hjalmar P. Petersen p.c.). Since the cognates of these adjectives take dative objects quite freely in Icelandic, it seems that dative objects of adjectives have lost ground in Faroese but this clearly merits further investigation.

The complete loss of the dative types in (3a–c) is exemplified below where Faroese is contrasted with Icelandic which has preserved dative in all these cases:^4

(4) a. Íslandska marknaðurin er seks ferðir stórri enn tann főroyski (Far.)
    Icelandic market-the six times.acc bigger than the Faroese
    ‘The Icelandic market is six times bigger than the Faroese market’

   b. Íslenski markaðurinn er sex sinnum stærri en sá færeyski (Ice.)
    Icelandic market-the six times.dat bigger than the Faroese
    ‘The Icelandic market is six times bigger than the Faroese market’

(5) a. Eg verði ikki kaldur (Faroese)
    l.nom will.be not cold
    ‘I will not be cold’

2. These are passives of monotransitive verbs that take dative objects. As discussed by Thráinsson et al. (2004: 266–269), such passives often require nominative subjects corresponding to dative objects in the active.

3. For further discussion of the status of dative experiencer subjects in Modern Faroese, see Petersen (2002); Eythórsson & Jónsson (2003) and Jónsson & Eythórsson (2005).

4. I use the term ‘preserve’ here because these datives are found in Old Icelandic. However, I am not aware of any evidence within Faroese that these datives existed in earlier stages of the language.
b. *Mér verður ekki kalt* (Icelandic)
   I.DAT will.be not cold
   ‘I will not be cold’

(6) a. *Vit bíðaðu eftir at kuldrin linnað* (Faroese)
   we waited for that cold-the.NOM subsided
   ‘We waited for the cold weather to subside’

b. *Við biðum eftir at óveðrinu linnti* (Icelandic)
   we waited for that storm-the.DAT subsided
   ‘We waited for the storm to subside’

Dative loss has been quite systematic in the history of Faroese as shown by the overview in (1). Moreover, there are very strong similarities here between Faroese and the Norwegian and Swedish dialects that have retained morphological dative case. For example, indirect objects have resisted dative loss more than direct objects in these dialects (Reinhammar 1973: 242–243) and objects of prepositions have proven even more resilient in that some dialects only have dative case with prepositions (Reinhammar 1973: 71). These dialects have also preserved dative experiencer subjects (or subject-like DPs) but datives with theme/patient subjects have completely disappeared. I conclude this from examples of the relevant verbs in Reinhammar (1973) even if this point is not explicitly made in that work.

I assume that dative loss in Faroese and the Scandinavian dative dialects is the result of imperfect learning during the critical period of language acquisition. The role of language acquisition in dative loss is fairly obvious where morphological evidence for dative case is weak as in the Scandinavian dative dialects. In these dialects, special dative forms are mostly confined to nouns with the definite suffix and some pronouns (Reinhammar 1973: 28–70). The role of imperfect learning is less obvious in Faroese where dative case is very well preserved morphologically, not only in nouns and pronouns, but also in adjectives, numerals and determiners (see Lockwood 1977 & Thráinsson et al. 2004).5

I take it that direct influence from Danish is not a factor here, but the bilingual situation in the Faroes in past centuries may have made it more difficult for Faroese children to acquire certain aspects of the grammar, including dative case. Indirect influence from Danish may also explain why Faroese has generally been more innovative than Icelandic in its syntax and inflectional morphology (see Thráinsson et al. 2004: 407–444 for an overview of syntactic and morphological changes in Faroese; see also Petersen 2006 for a recent discussion of Danish influence in Faroese).6

5. Genitive case, by contrast, is more or less lost in Modern Faroese (see Thráinsson et al. 2004: 433–434 and references cited there).

6. It seems that external factors do not play much of a role in case loss across languages. Thus, Boas (this volume) claims that dative loss in Texas German is mostly due to internal
If language acquisition is crucially involved in dative loss, datives should be more resistant to diachronic change, the more learnable they are. The overview in (3) suggests that this view is well-founded. It is clear e.g., that the best preserved datives in Faroese, datives with prepositions and dative indirect objects, are more learnable than other datives. The first class because most prepositions have a very high token frequency and the second class because there is a general rule linking dative case to indirect objects in Insular Scandinavian. Dative with direct objects is less learnable than dative with indirect objects because it is less predictable. However, as will be discussed in Section 4.2 below, not all monotransitive dat-verbs in Faroese are equal in this respect. Lexical semantics play a role as some verb classes are more vulnerable to dative loss than others, i.e., verbs with patient objects. The role of lexical semantics can also be seen in the diachrony of dative subjects in Faroese, as dative is still preserved with experiencer subjects but not theme/patient subjects (see Eythórsson & Jónsson 2003).

To successfully account for the diachronic development of monotransitive dat-verbs in Faroese, the imperfect learning approach requires that children have some universal expectations of how likely a particular semantic class of verbs is to take dative objects. For instance, learning that the Icelandic verb hjálpa ‘help’ takes a dative object must be easier than learning that kasta ‘throw’ takes a dative object because hjálpa is prototypical dat-verb but kasta is not. (The object of hjálpa takes some part in the helping event along with the subject whereas the object of kasta is controlled by the subject participant.) I do not know if this prediction has been tested in child language research but it would certainly be interesting to do so.

3. Dative objects in Icelandic

Two-place dat-verbs in Icelandic are the topic of this section. Since there is little to say about the diachronic development of dative objects in Icelandic, I will focus on those aspects of dat-verbs in Modern Icelandic that are most relevant for a proper understanding of dative loss in Faroese.

Modern Icelandic has a very high number of dat-verbs, or almost 800 according to Maling (2002), including 250–300 ditransitive verbs. Moreover, dat-verbs have been
very stable diachronically. This can be seen by comparing Maling’s (2002) discussion of dat-verbs in Modern Icelandic and Nygaard’s (1906) discussion of the same class in Old Icelandic.\(^8\) Only a handful of verbs have shifted from accusative to dative object or the other way around, e.g., hegna ‘punish’ where dative has replaced accusative and skora á hólum ‘challenge to a duel’ where accusative has replaced dative.\(^9\) This is shown below where Old Icelandic (7) is contrasted with Modern Icelandic (8).

\[(7)\] a. Jafnt hegndi hann ríka og óríka (Heimskringla, 320) 
   ‘He punished rich and poor alike’

b. Munt þá þá skora mér á hólum (Brennu-Njáls saga, 192) 
   ‘You will then challenge me to a duel’

\[(8)\] a. Hann hegndi þeim sem brutu reglurnar 
   ‘He punished those who broke the rules’

b. Enginn vill skora mig á hólum 
   ‘Noone wants to challenge me to a duel’

The high number of monotransitive dat-verbs in Icelandic strongly suggests that dative with direct objects cannot be purely idiosyncratic. If dative objects had to be learned on a verb-to-verb basis, a child learning the language would face a daunting task. In fact, the results by Sigurðardóttir (2002) suggest that dative objects are acquired before dative subjects and only slightly later than accusative objects. Dative is also used productively with new verbs in Icelandic (Barðdal 2001: 137–139, 269) and it is currently spreading at the expense of accusative with some verbs of motion, e.g., kaffæra ‘duck’, keyra ‘drive’ and skalla ‘head (a ball)’ (Barðdal 1993).

On the other hand, it is very difficult to formulate rules that specify precisely which verbs take dative direct objects in Icelandic. Thus, although monotransitive dat-verbs can be divided into reasonably coherent semantic classes (see 3.1 below), many of these classes also contain verbs with accusative objects (Maling 2002).

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8. By contrast, verbs with genitive objects have been less stable in the history of Icelandic (see Jónsson & Eythórsson 2007).

9. Strictly speaking, the original case is not known since both these verbs displayed variation between accusative and dative object in Old Icelandic. It is only clear that dative was lost with skora á hólum and accusative disappeared with hegna.
3.1 Semantic classes

**Dat-verbs in Icelandic fall into various semantic classes** (Maling 2002) and this is shown in (9)–(11) below. These lists are far from exhaustive but they are intended to be fairly representative of what kinds of verbs take dative objects in Icelandic. As a caveat, it should be noted that the boundaries between some of these classes are unclear, e.g., (10a) and (10b), and some of the distinctions shown here may be irrelevant for dative case selection in Icelandic.

(9) Stative verbs

a. Psych-verbs:

b. Verbs of comparison or connection:
   - likjast ‘be similar to’, nema ‘amount to’, samgleðjast ‘be happy for’, samrýmast ‘be consistent with’, tengjast ‘be connected to’, tilheyra ‘belong to’

(10) Atelic (non-stative) verbs

a. Verbs of helping or harming:
   - bjarða 'save', bjóða 'invite', eira 'spare', forða 'get out of danger, prevent', fylgja 'follow, accompany', hegna 'punish', hjálpa 'help', hjúkra 'nurse', hlífa 'spare', hlýða 'obey', klappa 'stroke, klóra 'scratch', leiðbeina 'instruct', liðsinna 'assist', misþyrma 'torture', òhlýðnast 'disobey', skemmta 'entertain', þjóna 'serve', þyrma 'spare'

b. Verbs of attitude or interaction:
   - andmæla 'protest', álása 'blame, bólla 'curse', fagna 'welcome', hafna 'reject', hallmæla 'speak badly of', hæla 'praise', kenna um 'blame for', mótmæla 'protest', þakka 'thank', úthýsa 'refuse to give shelter to'

c. Verbs of grooming (if the object is animate):
   - greiða 'comb', þurrka 'dry', þvo 'wash'

d. Verbs of dominance or organizing:
   - beina 'direct', haga 'arrange', raða 'arrange, line up', stilla 'keep within limits', stjórna 'run, govern, styra 'steer, direct'

e. Verbs of transportation:
   - aka 'drive', bakka 'back, fljúga 'fly', ríða 'ride, róa 'row', sigla 'sail'

f. Verbs of ballistic motion:
   - fleygja 'throw', grýta 'fling', henda 'throw', kasta 'throw', skjóta 'shoot', sparka 'kick', varpa 'throw', þeyta 'fling'

g. Other verbs of motion:
   - blaka 'lap, tip', dingla 'dangle, wag', dyfa 'dip', dæla 'pump', feykja 'blow away', fleysta 'float', hella 'pour', hrinda 'push', lyfta 'raise', mjaka 'move slightly', pumpa 'pump', rugga 'rock', skella 'slam', skvetta 'splash', smeygja 'slip', snúa 'turn', sveifla 'swing', velta 'roll, yta 'push', þýsta 'push, squeeze'
h. Verbs of emission:

(11) Telic verbs

a. Change-of-state verbs:

b. Verbs of killing:

c. Verbs of connection:
giftast ‘marry’, kvænast ‘marry (a woman)’, sameinast ‘unite with’, samgleðjast ‘rejoice with’, trúlofast ‘become engaged to’

These lists indicate that most two-place dat-verbs in Icelandic are atelic, i.e., they denote actions that do not have a natural endpoint.\textsuperscript{10} The atelic dat-verbs include verbs of helping or harming (10a), verbs of attitude or interaction (10b) and various verbs of motion (10e–g). Among the verbs listed in (10a) and (10b) are many that belong to the class of prototypical dat-verbs. Very few stative verbs take dative objects (9) and the number of telic dat-verbs is also rather low (11) compared to the number of acc-verbs in that class (see 3.3 below on change-of-state verbs).

In the following two subsections we will briefly discuss two classes of dat-verbs in Icelandic that are particularly relevant for the discussion of dative loss in Faroese in Section 4: motion verbs (3.2) and change-of-state verbs (3.3).

3.2 Motion verbs

Although some of the basic motion verbs take accusative objects, e.g., færa ‘move’, flytja ‘move’, and hreyfa ‘move’, most transitive motion verbs in Icelandic select dative objects. In fact, within some subclasses of motion verbs, such as verbs of ballistic motion, only dative is possible. Verbs of emission, which are semantically quite close to motion verbs, are also interesting in that they only occur with dative objects in Icelandic (Maling 2002):

(12) a. Nautið meig þá öllu vatninu
bull-the urinated then all.dat water-the.dat
‘Then the bull urinated all the water’

\textsuperscript{10} This can also be seen by inspecting the extensive list of dative verbs in Maling (2000).
b. Eldjállíð gaus mikilli ösku
   volcano-the spewed much.dat ashes.dat
   ‘The volcano spewed a lot of ashes’

Since emission verbs are rarely used as transitives, it would be difficult for children to acquire the dative with these verbs on an item-by-item basis. The dative here is arguably acquired as part of a more general rule about dative case. For Svenonius (2002), that rule concerns the event structure of the predicates in question: Dative is used whenever the verb denotes two subevents that do not overlap temporally. This is clearly illustrated with verbs that alternate between accusative and dative objects, where accusative is used for physically affected objects but dative for objects undergoing motion (Barðdal 1993). One such verb is sópa ‘sweep’:

(13) a. Jón sópaði gólfið
    John swept floor-the.acc
    ‘John swept the floor’

b. Jón sópaði snjónum burt
    John swept snow-the.dat away
    ‘John swept the snow away’

The dative in (13b) signals that the subevent associated with the agent need not last for the duration of the movement subevent as the action of the agent does not completely determine the outcome of the second subevent. By contrast, the accusative is used when the two subevents are temporally indistinguishable, as in (13a). In other words, the action of the agent in (13a) cannot be teased apart from the effects on the object.

Svenonius’ (2002) claim is correct in that all transitive verbs that clearly involve two temporally distinct subevents take dative objects in Icelandic. However, this is only a one-way correlation, since verbs denoting an event that cannot be broken into subevents may select dative objects in Icelandic. This is clearly seen with verbs of accompanied motion that take dative objects, e.g., ýta ‘push’ and lyfta ‘raise’. It is also worth noting that despite the validity of Svenonius’ (2002) claim for Icelandic, motion verbs have been the prime targets of dative loss in Faroese along with change-of-state verbs (see 4.2. below). Thus, it appears that cross-linguistic forces concerning a dative prototype have been stronger than language-specific rules in the diachronic development of dative objects in Faroese.

3.3 Change-of-state verbs

The dat-verbs listed in (11a) are only a small subclass of transitive change-of-state verbs in Icelandic; by inspecting the extensive lists of change-of-state verbs in Jóhannsdóttir (1996) it can easily be verified that most verbs in this class take accusative objects. Moreover, the dat-verbs are systematically restricted in ways which the
ACC-verbs are not. First, none of these DAT-verbs are related to adjectives whereas many of the ACC-verbs are adjective-related:

(14) Verb Related adjective
a. bleyta ‘wet’ blautur ‘wet’
b. deyfa ‘numb’ daufur ‘numb’
c. fylla ‘fill’ fullur ‘full’
d. herða ‘harden’ harður ‘tough’
e. lengja ‘lengthen’ langur ‘long’
f. þynna ‘dilute’ þunnur ‘thin’

Second, many of the ACC-verbs are of variable telicity as they denote an event that may but need not have a designated endpoint. One of these verbs is dýpka ‘deepen’:

(15) a. Jón dýpkaði holuna í 40 mínútum (atelic)
    ‘John deepened hole-the for 40 minutes’
    John deepened hole-the for 40 minutes
b. Jón dýpkaði holuna á 40 mínútum (telic)
    ‘John deepened hole-the in 40 minutes’
    John deepened hole-the in 40 minutes

The accusative object of dýpka “measures out” the progress of the event, i.e., the bigger the hole is, the further the event of deepening the hole has progressed. However, since there is no designated endpoint for such an event, it is not very natural to use dýpka with temporal phrases like á 40 mínútum ‘in 40 minutes’ that forces a telic reading. Therefore, (15b) sounds strange unless a measure phrase like um tvo metra ‘two meters’ is added or the sentence is uttered in a context where there is some prespecified depth for the hole.

The examples in (15) show that dýpka is basically an atelic verb that may receive a telic interpretation in certain contexts. I am not aware of any DAT-verb that is like dýpka in this respect. For instance, most of the DAT-verbs listed in (11a) are strictly telic; the ones that may be atelic can also be telic without any special context, thereby contrasting with (15b).

4. Dative objects in Faroese

The number of two-place DAT-verbs is much lower in Modern Faroese than in Modern Icelandic. Føroysk orðabók (1998) (henceforth, FO) lists almost 200 monotransitive

11. As far as I know, this is a novel observation.
12. These are the “degree achievements” of Dowty (1979). For further discussion of such verbs, see Hay, Kennedy and Levin (1999).
DAT-verbs but only about half of them are still part of everyday language. Many of these verbs have either become obsolete or restricted to very formal registers. By comparison, monotransitive DAT-verbs in active use in Icelandic are between 400 and 500 to judge by the verbs listed by Maling (2000). This difference between Icelandic and Faroese is a clear indication that many of the original DAT-verbs have shifted to accusative case in Faroese (see further in 4.2 below).

4.1 Monotransitive DAT-verbs

The following lists give an overview of monotransitive DAT-verbs that are still in regular use in contemporary Faroese. Since these lists are mostly based on a search through the electronic version of FO, I cannot be sure that they are exhaustive. Verbs that are shown with accusative as well as dative in FO are marked (ACC/DAT) and verbs whose Icelandic cognates select accusative objects are underlined. The classification here is slightly simplified compared to the Icelandic lists in (9)–(11).

(16) Stative verbs

hoyna til 'belong to', likjast 'be similar to', lita (vael) til 'think (highly) of', mistrúgva 'suspect, not respect', rúma 'hold, have capacity for', standa nær 'belong to', tekkjast 'please' (ACC/DAT), trúgva 'believe, trust', viðvíkja 'concern'

(17) Atelic (non-stative) verbs

a. Verbs of helping or harming:

ambeta 'take care of (animals)', ansa 'take care of', basa 'beat, prevent', bjarga 'save', bjóða 'invite', eftirlíka 'give in to', eira 'spare', forða 'get out of danger, prevent', forfylgja 'persecute', fylgja 'follow', fyribyrja 'prevent', gníggja 'rub', hindra 'obstruct', hjálpa 'help', hyggja at/efir 'check, take care of', hýsa 'house, give shelter to', kína 'caress', klappa 'stroke', kláa 'scratch', klóra 'scratch', leiðbeina 'instruct' (ACC/DAT), líva 'spare, shield', lívbjarga 'provide for', núta 'cause pain', rugga 'rock (a child)', sigo til 'guide', skeinkja 'pour a drink', skemta 'entertain', skriða 'scratch, protect', stóda 'stop', strúka 'caress, touch', stuðla 'support' (ACC/DAT), stuttleika 'entertain', tarna 'delay, stop' (ACC/DAT), tálma 'obstruct', tæna 'serve', undirvísa 'teach', vagga 'rock (a child)'

13. Note that the numbers for Icelandic and Faroese do not include two-place DAT-verbs that require reflexive dative objects.

14. There are some non-agentive verbs in Faroese, such as eydnast 'succeed', where the dative argument seems to vacillitate between subject and object. Verbs of this kind are not included here.

15. As discussed in 4.3 below, the variation between accusative and dative objects is much more widespread than FO indicates.
b. Verbs of attitude or interaction:


- Verbs of grooming (if the object is animate):

- Motion verbs:
  - knógvu ‘carry with great difficulty’ (ACC/DAT), lyfta ‘raise’ (ACC/DAT), lætta ‘raise (slightly)’ (ACC/DAT), vika ‘move’ (ACC/DAT)

- Other verbs:

The subclasses in (17) should not be taken too literally, but the important point here is that many of the verbs listed in (17) are prototypical DAT-verbs. On the other hand, there are very few verbs whose objects display proto-patient properties, e.g., motion verbs and change-of-state verbs. In fact, all the motion verbs listed in (17d) vary between accusative and dative objects according to FO. In Section 4.2 below, we will take a closer look at motion verbs and change-of-state verbs and illustrate how much dative loss has affected these two verb classes.

Some of the Faroese DAT-verbs listed above take accusative objects in Icelandic. This is exemplified below with the verbs gloypa/gleypa ‘swallow’, hýsa ‘give shelter to’ and mjólka ‘milk’.

(19) a. Harrin let stóran fisk gloypa Jónasi (Faroese)
   lord-the let big fish swallow Jonas.DAT
   ‘The lord made a big fish swallow Jonas’

16. Reinhammar (1973: 216–218) points out that extending dative case to the object of mjólka is common in the Scandinavian dative dialects, especially those that have preserved dative case with verbs of grooming. Thus, it seems like mjólka in these dialects, as well as in Faroese, is treated like a verb of grooming.
For some of the Faroese dat-verbs corresponding to Icelandic acc-verbs the directionality of change is unclear. However, evidence from Old Icelandic suggests that the dative with all the verbs exemplified above is innovative in Faroese and the same is also true of eggja ‘incite’. On the other hand, Icelandic may have innovated with raka ‘shave’ and boða ‘summon’ as both of these verbs select dative objects in Old Icelandic.

Four of the dat-verbs in Faroese corresponding to acc-verbs in Icelandic are verbs of grooming: baða ‘bathe’, klippa ‘cut (sby’s hair)’, raka ‘shave’ and sleikja ‘lick, flatter’. This is hardly a coincidence as dative seems to be productive with this verb class in Faroese. As Victoria Absalonsen (p.c.) has pointed out to me, dative is used with two new grooming verbs in Faroese, both of which concern hair styling: trimma ‘trim’ and skinna ‘clean-shave’. I don’t know of any other new verbs in Faroese with dative direct objects but the existence of these two verbs is still important because it supports my claim that the diachronic development of dative objects is sensitive to lexical semantics.

Note that verbs of grooming are not prototypical dat-verbs as defined by Blume (1998) since the object participant is not active independent of the actions of the subject participant. However, the object participant is sentient and typically understood as a beneficiary of the event denoted by the verb. In this respect, the object participant has some independence from the subject participant even if it is inactive. Hence, one could argue that verbs of grooming are at least semantically close to prototypical dat-verbs.

17. To this list we might also add skoyna ‘wipe (sby’s ass)’, because its Icelandic cognate skeina ‘wipe (sby’s ass)’ varies between accusative and dative object in Modern Icelandic.
4.2 Dative loss with motion verbs and change-of-state verbs

I am aware of eight motion verbs that are attested with dative objects in the ballads but have shifted to accusative case now: bregða 'move quickly, draw', droypa 'bow', kasta 'throw', leggja 'place, park', rinda 'push', skjóta 'shoot', stíga 'step' and varpa 'throw'. We have already seen this exemplified with kasta in (1). Two additional examples, with droypa and leggja, are provided in (21):

(21) a. Allir droypu Hövdin ðiður, / eingin tordi tala (Hamm. I., 139)
    everyone bowed head.DAT down noone dared speak
    'Everyone was downcast and did not dare to speak'

    b. Atli legði skipum sínum / eystur millum fjarda (Hamm. I., 66)
    Atli placed ships.DAT self.DAT east between fjords
    'Atli berthed his ships east between the fjords'

The verb droypa is very rare in present-day Faroese but in so far as it is used, the object must be accusative (22a). There is also a slight complication with leggja which no longer has exactly the same meaning as in (21b). Still, the meaning of (22b) is close enough to (21b) so that the shift from dative to accusative could not be attributed to changes in lexical semantics.18

(22) a. Allir droypu hóvdið everyone bowed head-the.ACC
    'Everyone was downcast'

    b. Atli legði skip síní
    Atli put.away ships.ACC self.ACC
    'Atli retired his ships'

There are many transitive motion verbs that seem to have lost dative case to judge by comparative evidence from Old Icelandic (see also Thráinsson et al. 2004: 430). These verbs include: kippa 'pull, jerk', loypa (hleypa) 'let go', oysa (ausa) 'scoop, ladle', rógva (róa) 'row', ryðja burtur/burt 'clear way', sigla 'sail', sláa (slá) 'hit', sleingja (slengja) 'sling, throw', sópa 'sweep', stinga 'stick, slip' and verpa 'lay (eggs)'.19 This is exemplified below with the verbs kippa and sigla where Old and Modern Icelandic are contrasted with Modern Faroese.

(23) a. Hann snarast við og kippti í brott spjótinu (Gull-Póris saga, 1140)
    he reacts quickly and pulled away spear-the.DAT
    'He reacted quickly and removed the spear'

18. Moreover, the Icelandic cognate leggja selects a dative object in both uses.

19. The Icelandic cognate of these Faroese verbs is shown in brackets in cases where the infinitive form in these two languages differs.
b. Faðirinn kipti drengnum til sín (Modern Icelandic)
father-the pulled boy-the.DAT towards self
‘The father pulled the boy towards him’

c. Faðirin kipti drongin til sín (Modern Faroese)
father-the pulled boy-the.ACC towards himself
‘The father pulled the boy towards him’

(24) a. Sigldi Kolbeinn þessu skipi til Noregs (Brennu-Njáls saga, 345)
sailed Kolbeinn this.DAT ship.DAT to Norway
‘Kolbeinn sailed this ship to Norway’

b. þeir sigla bátum upp á land (Modern Icelandic)
they sail boat-the.DAT up to shore
‘They sail the boat up to the shore’

c. Teir sigla bátin upp á land (Modern Faroese)
they sail boat-the.ACC up to shore
‘They sail the boat up to the shore’

As for change-of-state verbs, there seem to be very few examples of such verbs with
dative objects in the ballads. Still, the verbs sökkja (sökkva) ‘sink’, læsa ‘lock’ and týna
‘lose, kill’ are attested:

(25) a. Hann sökkir oss öllum niður (Hamm. I., 76)
he sinks us.DAT all.DAT down
‘He will sink us all’

b. tað kann öllum lásum læsa (Hamm. II., 258)
it can all.DAT locks.DAT lock
‘It can lock all locks’

c. skuldi eg týnt ter av livi (Hamm. I., 71)
should I deprived you.DAT of life
‘I would have killed you’

In Modern Faroese, the dative has been replaced by accusative with all these verbs.
This is shown in (26):

(26) a. Tað er vanligt at sökkja gomul skip
it is usual to sink old.ACC ships.ACC
‘It is usual to sink old ships’

b. Tit skulu læsa dyrnar
you should lock door-the.ACC
‘You should lock the door’

c. Tørvor kann verða á at týna skaðadjón
need can become on to kill vermins.ACC
‘It may become necessary to kill vermins’
Comparative evidence from Old Icelandic suggests that the following change-of-state verbs in Faroese have lost an older dative: broyta (breyta) ‘change’, hvølva (hvolfa) ‘capsize’, lúka (ljúka) ‘finish’, spilla ‘spoil’ and tapa ‘lose’. All these verbs take accusative objects in Modern Faroese. This is shown below with the verbs broyta and spilla:

\[(27)\]

\[\text{a. } svo \text{ breyta } öllu \text{ sem þú segir fyrir} \quad \text{(Grettis saga, 1093)}\]

then change everything.DAT as you dictate 'then change everything as you dictate'

\[\text{b. } Unga \text{ fólkið reyndi } að \text{ breyta } gömlum sið \quad \text{(Modern Icelandic)}\]

young people-the tried to change old.DAT custom.DAT ‘Young people tried to change an old custom’

\[\text{c. } Ungdómrurin royndi } at \text{ broyta } gamlan sið \quad \text{(Modern Faroese)}\]

young.people-the tried to change old.ACC custom.ACC ‘Young people tried to change an old custom’

\[(28)\]

\[\text{a. } Aldrei skal } hún \text{ spilla } okkrú \text{ vinfengu} \quad \text{(Brennu-Njáls saga, 161)}\]

never shall she spoil our.DAT friendship.DAT 'She shall never spoil our friendship'

\[\text{b. } Sumir } \text{ halda } að \text{ tókuord spilli } málinu \quad \text{(Modern Icelandic)}\]

some think that loanwords corrupt the.language.DAT ‘Some people think that loanwords corrupt the language’

\[\text{c. } Teir } \text{ halda, } at \text{ tókuordini spilla } málið \quad \text{(Modern Faroese)}\]

they think that loanwords-the corrupt language-the.ACC ‘They think that the loanwords corrupt the language’

It is clear from Reinhammar’s (1973) discussion of motion verbs and change-of-state verbs that these verb classes have also suffered heavy losses in the Scandinavian dative dialects. The reason is presumably the same as in Faroese: the objects of these verbs are patients and quite far away from the more active objects of prototypical DAT-verbs.

4.3 Variation between dative and accusative in Modern Faroese

Dative loss is not just a fact about the history of Faroese; it is an ongoing process that is quite evident in present-day Faroese. This can be seen in the widespread variation between between accusative and dative objects with many two-place verbs that took only dative objects in older Faroese, especially verbs that are not proto-typical DAT-verbs. For instance, the four native speakers I consulted accept the following examples where innovative accusative case is used with náa ‘reach’, útíhýsa ‘exclude’ and gloypa ‘swallow’:

\[(29)\]

\[\text{a. } Vilt } \text{ tú } náa \text{ toppin?}\]

want you reach top-the.ACC ‘Do you want to reach the top?’
b. Menningin útíhýsir ikki fortíðina
   progress-the excludes not past-the.ACC
   ‘Progress does not exclude the past’

c. So glyypa tit tað sum absoluttan sannleika
   then swallow you it.ACC as absolute truth
   ‘Then you (pl.) swallow it as an absolute truth’

All the examples above were found on the web. With all these verbs, the original dative is more common than accusative:

(30) a. Vilt tú náa toppinum?
    want you reach top-the.DAT
    ‘Do you want to reach the top?’

b. Menningin útíhýsir ikki fortíðini
    progress-the excludes not past-the.DAT
    ‘Progress does not exclude the past’

c. So glyypa tit tí sum absoluttan sannleika
    then swallow you it.DAT as absolute truth
    ‘Then you (pl.) swallow it as an absolute truth’

I have also found on-line examples of innovative accusative case with the verbs mótmæla ‘protest’, mota ‘meet’ and styra ‘direct’, e.g., the examples in (31) below. As with the verbs shown above, dative is more common than accusative (32).

(31) a. Önnur 7 hava mótmælt framferðaráttin hjá kommununi
    other 7 have protested policies-the.ACC by the.county
    ‘Seven others have protested against the policies of the county’

b. Tá møtti eg ongan annan enn Drew Barrymore
    then met I noone.ACC other.ACC than Drew Barrymore
    ‘Then I met no other than Drew Barrymore’

c. Trýstið liggur á teimum at styra líðið á
    pressure-the lies on them to lead team-the.ACC to
    sigursgotuna
    the.victory
    ‘The pressure is on them to get the team winning’

(32) a. Önnur 7 hava mótmælt framferðaráttinum hjá kommununi
    other 7 have protested policies-the.DAT by the.county
    ‘Seven others have protested against the policies of the county’

b. Tá møtti eg ongum aðrum enn Drew Barrymore
    then met I noone.DAT other.DAT than Drew Barrymore
    ‘Then I met no other than Drew Barrymore’
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c. Trystið liggur á teimum at stýra lîðinum á sigursgotuna
pressure-the lies on them to lead team-the.DAT to the.victory

‘The pressure is on them to get the team winning’

Opinions are divided among my four informants on the use of accusative here: (31a) and (31c) are accepted by three of them but (31b) is accepted by only one. Thus, it seems that the verb møta ‘meet’ preserves dative better than the other verbs exemplified in (29)–(32). This is not surprising since møta is presumably the only prototypical DAT-verb here as the event described by this verb involves independent action by the object. As discussed by Blume (1998: 267), in the context of the German verb begegnen ‘meet’, a meeting event can be viewed as the crossing of the paths of two independently moving objects. By contrast, little or no independent object activity is entailed by the other verbs in (29)–(32).

4.4 Double objects

As discussed in Section 2.2, indirect objects are a stronghold for dative case in Faroese. This is shown by two facts: (i) the number of ditransitive verbs with dative indirect objects in Faroese is approximately 250, which is about the same number as in Icelandic, (ii) dative with indirect objects is never replaced by accusative in Faroese, even if double accusative objects are possible. However, it appears that dative indirect objects are giving way to PPs as Faroese may be moving from the double DP construction to the DP-PP construction. This is shown by the results of a recent survey of 243 speakers in six different localities in the Faroe Islands. In this survey, two ditransitive verbs were tested: selja ‘sell’ and geva ‘give’. The test sentences are given in (33) and (34). The percentages in brackets show how many of the participants accepted these test sentences.

(33) a. Hann soldi konuni bilin (81,0%)
he sold woman-the.DAT car-the.ACC
‘He sold the woman the car’

b. Hann soldi húsini til lógyan (93,0%)
he sold house(s)-the.ACC to Jógvan
‘He sold the house(s) to Jógvan’

20. This was a general survey of syntactic variation in Faroese, carried out by Victoria Absalonsen and Helena á Logmansbø with assistance from the linguists at Fróðskaparsetur Føroyja. This survey is part of a research project on Faroese that I have worked on in collaboration with Höskuldur Thráinsson (principal investigator) and Pórhallur Eyþórsson.
These results show that the DP-PP construction is widely accepted with selja (33b) but less so with geva (34b), a contrast already noted by Thráinsson et al. (2004: 264). It is not clear why these two verbs differ, but it may have to do with the fact that geva is more common than selja. It is also important to note that the DP-PP construction is highly restricted in Icelandic, where examples like (33b) and (34b) are impossible:

(35) a. Hann seldi konunni bílinn
he sold woman-the.DAT car-the.ACC
‘He sold the woman the car’

b. *Hann seldi húsið til Jóhanns
he sold house-the.ACC to Jóhann
‘He sold the house to Jóhann’

(36) a. Hún gaf þuríði bókina
she gave Þuríður.DAT book-the.ACC
‘She gave Þuríður the book’

b. *Hún gaf skyrtuna til Mariu
she gave shirt-the.ACC to Mary
‘She gave the shirt to Mary’

In view of this contrast between the two languages, it is tempting to relate the emergence of the DP-PP construction in Faroese to the general loss of dative case. In fact, this is not the only example of PPs replacing dative DPs in Faroese; this can also be seen with objects of adjectives (cf. the discussion below (3) in Section 2) and also a handful of verbs, e.g., giftast ‘marry’, which used to take a dative object but now requires the preposition við ‘with’.

5. Concluding remarks

In this paper, verbs with dative objects in Insular Scandinavian have been discussed, with special emphasis on the loss of dative objects with two-place verbs in Faroese. There is much less to say about Icelandic which has been very stable with respect to dative objects. The main points of the paper are summarized in (I)–(IV) below:

I. Dative case has been eroding syntactically for many centuries in Faroese and has affected all kinds of datives, except dative indirect objects and datives with prepositions.
This can be illustrated with data from the Faroese ballads as well as comparative evidence from Old Icelandic.

II. Dative loss in Faroese has been quite systematic and strikingly similar to dative loss in the Norwegian and Swedish dative dialects. Thus, verbs whose objects display proto-patient properties, i.e., motion verbs and change-of-state verbs, have been the prime targets of dative loss with montransitive $\text{dat}$-verbs in Faroese.

III. Dative objects of two-place verbs continue to give way to accusative objects in contemporary Faroese and prototypical $\text{dat}$-verbs seem to be more resistant to this change than other verbs. Moreover, the double DP construction appears to be losing ground to the DP-PP construction, thereby weakening the status of dative indirect objects.

IV. Despite the general loss of datives in Faroese, there are sporadic examples where dative objects have replaced accusative objects in Faroese and dative objects may still be productive with verbs of grooming.

Needless to say, many issues concerning the diachrony of dative objects in Insular Scandinavian need to be explored further, empirically as well as theoretically. I intend to tackle some of these issues in future work.

References


