

# How to fill the prefield in Icelandic: the diachrony of expletives and Stylistic Fronting

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Verb-second and the prefield in Icelandic

- Icelandic is a V2 language

– maximally one constituent in the clause-initial prefinite position (‘prefield’):

- (1) a. Hún **lagaði** kaffi í eldhúsinu. (SUBJ-V-OBJ)  
she.NOM make.PST coffee.ACC in kitchen.DAT.DEF  
‘She made coffee in the kitchen.’
- b. Kaffi **lagaði** hún í eldhúsinu. (OBJ-V-SUBJ)  
coffee.ACC make.PST she.NOM in kitchen.DAT.DEF  
‘She made coffee in the kitchen.’
- c. [Í eldhúsinu] **lagaði** hún kaffi. (ADJ-V-SUBJ)  
in kitchen.DAT.DEF make.PST she.NOM coffee.ACC  
‘She made coffee in the kitchen.’

- V1 declaratives are also possible, esp. in earlier stages (Butt et al. 2014; Booth et al. 2017):

- (2) a. **Voru** þar tvö skip í búnaði. (presentational)  
be.PST there two.NOM ships.NOM in preparations  
‘There were two ships in the preparations.’  
(1250, Sturlunga.408.710)
- b. **Tekur** nú að hausta. (impersonal)  
begin.PRS now to become-autumn.INF  
‘It now starts to become autumn.’ (1310, Grettir.48)

- Modern Icelandic: prefield is an information-structurally privileged position associated with topics (Rögnvaldsson & Thráinsson 1990; Sells 2005).

- In earlier stages, the structure-function associations for topics are less clear:
  - Topics can occur in prefield or in postfinite domain (Booth 2018).
  - Increasing preference for topics to occur in prefield over time, as opposed to other positions (Booth et al. 2017).
  - Increasing preference for the prefield to host topics over time, as opposed to other things (Booth & Schätzle forthcoming).

## 1.2 Two prefield phenomena in modern Icelandic

- Phenomenon 1: **expletive það** (EXPL)

- Occurs in presentationals and impersonals:

(3) a. **Það** var töluverður snjór yfir öllu. (presentational)  
 EXPL be.PST considerable.NOM snow.NOM over everything  
 ‘There was a considerable amount of snow over everything.’  
 (2008, Ofsi.772)

b. **Það** var dansað í gær. (impersonal)  
 EXPL be.PST dance.PASS.PTCP yesterday  
 ‘It was danced yesterday.’

- Positionally restricted to the prefield (Sells 2005; Sigurðsson 2007; Vikner 1995):

(4) a. **Það** var dansað í gær.  
 EXPL be.PST dance.PASS.PTCP yesterday  
 ‘It was danced yesterday.’

b. [Í gær] var (\***það**) dansað.  
 yesterday be.PST (\*EXPL) dance.PASS.PTCP  
 ‘Yesterday it was danced.’

- Signals a V2 sentence which lacks a topic (Zaenen 1983; Rögnvaldsson & Thráinsson 1990; Sells 2005; Booth et al. 2017; Booth 2018).

- Phenomenon 2: **Stylistic Fronting (SF)**

- Fronting of categories which cannot usually be fronted in a Germanic V2 language (non-finite verbs, verbal particles, negation, adjectival and nominal predicates).
- Generally assumed to not have any information-structural effect.
- Classic accounts focus on embedded clauses (e.g. Maling 1990):

(5) a. Þetta er mál [sem **rætt** hefur verið]. (PASS.PTCP-V)  
 DEM be.PRS issue REL discuss.PASS.PTCP have.PRS be.PST.PTCP  
 ‘This is the issue which has been discussed.’

b. Þetta er mál [sem **upp** hefur komið]. (PTCL-V)  
 DEM be.PRS issue REL up have.PRS come.PST.PTCP  
 ‘This is the issue which has come up.’



- But recently this claim has been challenged for Modern Icelandic (Angantýsson 2017):
  - Synchronic questionnaire-based survey.
  - EXPL and SF are not actually fully interchangeable.

### 1.3 This talk

- I investigate the validity of this claim against diachronic data from IcePaHC (Wallenberg et al. 2011).
- IcePaHC:
  - Penn-style treebank of historical Icelandic.
  - 1150-2008 (all attested stages).
  - Approx. 1 million words.
  - Lemmatised, POS-tagged, constituent structure, grammatical functions.
  - Issues: relatively small; data sparsity for certain centuries; some genre imbalance.
- For sake of time, matrix declaratives only (subordinate clauses for future work...)
- Building on previous work by Booth (2018):
  - Detailed corpus-study of expletives in IcePaHC.
  - Highlighted some interesting SF data for Old Icelandic (1150-1350).
  - But SF in diachrony has not been thoroughly researched.
- Questions:
  - Are EXPL and SF also in complementary distribution in earlier stages?
  - Do they emerge at roughly the same point in the diachrony?
  - Do they share the same motivation or do they emerge via different motivations?
  - How can the diachronic picture inform our understanding of EXPL and SF in Modern Icelandic?
- Using diachronic corpus-derived data to inform our view of synchrony.

## 2 The emergence of the expletive

### 2.1 Standard view

- Modern Icelandic: EXPL is restricted to topicless sentences (presentationals, impersonals).
  - EXPL is a placeholder for the topic position (prefield).
  - See Zaenen (1983); Rögnvaldsson & Thráinsson (1990); Sells (2005); Booth et al. (2017); Booth (2018).

- Older stages:

- EXPL is absent in Old Norse/Icelandic (Faarlund 1990).
- Topicless sentences are typically V1:

(10) Voru og tuttugu hundruð í búfé... (presentational)  
 be.PST also twenty hundred.NOM in livestock  
 ‘There were twenty hundreds among the livestock...’ (1325, Arni.688)

(11) Var þá talað um sættir... (impersonal)  
 be.PST then tell.PASS.PTCP about agreements  
 ‘It was then told about some agreements...’ (1250, Sturlunga.449.2190)

- EXPL first appears in c.1500 (Rögnvaldsson 2002).
- Increase in frequency during 19th century (Hróarsdóttir 1998).

## 2.2 Findings from Booth (2018)

- Diachronic study of expletives based on IcePaHC.
- Old Icelandic (1150-1349) already exhibits a *það* which is positionally restricted to the pre-field in topicless sentences:
  - Specifically in impersonals with a ‘say-type’ predicate and a clausal object:

(12) a. **Það**<sub>i</sub> er nú að segja frá Alexandro konungi, [að hann  
 EXPL be.PRS now to say.INF from Alexander king COMP he.NOM  
 hefir lagst til svefns]<sub>i</sub>.  
 have.PRS go.PST to sleep  
 ‘It is now to say of King Alexander that he has gone to sleep.’  
 (1300, Alexander.1380)

b. **Nú** er að segja frá Alexandro, [að, hvar sem hann fer,  
 now be.PRS to say.INF from Alexander COMP wherever he.NOM go.PRS  
 þá...].  
 RSMP  
 ‘Now is to say of Alexander that, wherever he goes, then...’  
 (1300, Alexander.396)

- In other topicless contexts, EXPL emerges later:
  - Impersonals without a clausal object:

Time period	<i>það</i>	No <i>það</i>	Total	% <i>það</i>
1150-1350	2	80	82	2.4%
1351-1550	1	47	48	2.1%
1551-1750	0	24	24	0.0%
1751-1900	3	32	35	8.6%
1901-2008	24	7	31	77.4%
<b>All periods</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>220</b>	

Table 1: Frequency of prefield *það* in impersonals without clausal OBJ in IcePaHC, 1150-2008

- Presentationals:

Time period	<i>það</i>	No <i>það</i>	Total	% <i>það</i>
1150-1350	0	39	39	0.0%
1351-1550	5	33	38	13.2%
1551-1750	4	21	25	16.0%
1751-1900	35	19	54	64.8%
1901-2008	86	5	91	94.5%
<b>All periods</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>247</b>	

Table 2: Frequency of prefield *það* in presentationals in IcePaHC, 1150-2008

- Change: *það* generalises as a prefield (topic position) placeholder to all topicless constructions on model of restricted contexts with a say-type predicate and a clausal object (12-a).
- Crucially, EXPL is never attested in a context beyond those we know for Modern Icelandic:
  - Only ever occurs in topicless constructions.
  - Never occurs in contexts with a topical subject:<sup>1</sup>

$$(13) \quad {}^{\text{NA}}\text{það} - \text{V} - \text{SUBJ}_{\text{TOPIC}}$$

- Overall story:
  - *það* has a long history as a prefield (topic position) placeholder.
  - It has generalised to new contexts in this function over time.

<sup>1</sup>‘NA’ = not attested; grammaticality judgements not available for historical Icelandic!

### 3 Stylistic Fronting and the Subject Gap Condition

#### 3.1 The Subject Gap Condition (SGC) in Modern Icelandic

- Claim: SF in Modern Icelandic is only possible in clauses with a ‘subject gap’, i.e. in clauses where there is no subject in the prefield (Maling 1990; Sigurðsson 2010).

- subject is postfinite and indefinite (presentationals):

(14) Þegar **komnir** verða *hvolpar...* (presentational)  
when come.PST.PTCP become.PRS puppies.NOM  
‘When puppies will have arrived...’

- subject is genuinely absent (impersonals):

(15) Þegar **komið** var þangað... (impersonal)  
when come.PASS.PTCP be.PST thither  
‘When it was arrived there...’

- However this structural generalization doesn’t seem adequate, as SF is not possible in all clauses where the prefield is not occupied by a subject (‘subject gap’).

- SF is ruled out in clauses with a postfinite definite subject:

(16) \*Þegar **komnir** verða *hvolparnir..* (late definite SUBJ)  
when come.PST.PTCP become.PRS puppies.NOM.DEF  
‘When the puppies will have arrived...’

(17) \*Þegar **komin** var *rútan* þangað... (late definite SUBJ)  
when come.PASS.PTCP be.PST bus.NOM.DEF thither  
‘When the bus had arrived there...’

- Another way of looking at things: SF is only possible in sentences which lack a topical subject (‘topic gap condition’)

- Definite subjects = given information, i.e. continuous topics, SF not permitted.

- Presentationals and impersonals are topicless contexts, and hence permit SF.

#### 3.2 Corpus study: Stylistic Fronting in IcePaHC

- Corpus investigation:

- All matrix clauses where prefield is occupied by: nonfinite verb; verbal particle; negation; nominal or adjectival predicate.

- Data extraction via CorpusSearch queries.

- Particular attention to subject properties.

### 3.2.1 Preliminary data

- Preliminary data:
  - SF decreases in frequency over time, in line with previous claims (e.g. Sigurðsson 2017).

Time period	<i>n</i>	% of total matrix clauses
1150-1349	484	3.2%
1350-1549	643	3.1%
1550-1749	443	3.7%
1750-1899	328	2.7%
1900-2008	213	1.8%
All periods	2111	2.9%

Table 3: Stylistic Fronting in matrix clauses in IcePaHC, 1150-2008

- Issue with the data for SF of ‘verbal particles’:
  - Many of the examples are not actually SF.
  - Verbal particles and unstressed verbal prefixes bear the same POS tag in the corpus (RP).
  - Many of the examples involve a verb with an unstressed prefix (not SF):

(18) Ég **með**-kenni mínar misgjörðir.  
I.NOM recognise.PRS my transgressions  
‘I recognise my transgressions’. (1593, Eintal.24)

(19) Hann **af**-sakaði sig strax.  
he.NOM apologise.PST .REFL immediately  
‘He immediately apologised for himself.’ (1659, Pislarsaga.145)

- **Examples of ‘SF with verbal particles’ will be excluded from now on.**

### 3.2.2 Does the Subject Gap Condition hold for earlier stages?

- Operationalisation of subject properties:
  1. Definite subject in postfinite domain: SF-V(...)-SUBJ<sub>DEF</sub>.<sup>2</sup>
  2. Indefinite subject in postfinite domain: SF-V(...)-SUBJ<sub>INDEF</sub> (= presentational).<sup>3</sup>
  3. ‘Pro-drop’.
  4. Genuinely subjectless (= impersonal).
- Hypothesis: if Subject Gap Condition holds, then we expect SF to occur in types 2-4 but not in type 1.

<sup>2</sup>For the purpose of search queries, ‘definite subject’ = subject which is pronominal or contains an overt definite marker.

<sup>3</sup>‘Indefinite subject’ = subject which is not pronominal nor contains and does not contain an overt definite marker.

- Surprising: majority of historically attested SF examples have a definite subject (contra SGC).

Time period	definite SUBJ		indefinite SUBJ		*pro* SUBJ		genuinely subjectless	
	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	% of total	<i>n</i>	% of total
1150-1349	277	66%	105	25%	8	2%	31	7%
1350-1549	378	74%	92	18%	6	1%	37	7%
1550-1749	136	64%	63	30%	4	2%	10	5%
1750-1899	166	70%	54	23%	1	0%	17	7%
1900-2008	85	66%	22	17%	2	2%	19	15%
All periods	1042	69%	336	22%	21	1%	114	8%

Table 4: Stylistic Fronting by subject type in IcePaHC, 1150-2008

- Moreover: SF with a definite subject is maintained throughout all stages of Icelandic, even in the modern period (1900-2008).
- SF of all categories attested with a definite subject:

- (20)
- en **eigi** munuð þið jafnir hreystimenn vera. (NEG-V-SUBJ)  
 but NEG will you.NOM equal valiant-men be.INF  
 ‘but you will not be equally valiant men.’ (1310, Grettir.983)
  - Svikið** hefir þú oss Egill. (PST.PTCP-V-SUBJ)  
 betray.PST.PTCP have.PRS you.NOM we.ACC Egill  
 ‘You have betrayed us, Egill.’ (1350, Bandamenn.103)
  - Ótrúligur** er-tu nú, Vagnhöfði. (AdjPred-V-SUBJ)  
 unfaithful be.PRS-you.NOM now Vagnhöfði  
 ‘You are now unfaithful, Vagnhöfði.’ (1650, Illugi.400)
  - Enginn bardagamaður** má ég heita. (NomPred-V-SUBJ)  
 no.NOM warrior.NOM may I.NOM be-called.INF  
 ‘I may not be called a warrior.’ (1790, Finnbraedra.297)

- Doesn’t just occur with pronominal subjects, but also with full NPs with definite marking:

- (21)
- En **fullt** var skipið. (AdjPred-V-SUBJ)  
 but full.NOM be.PST ship.NOM.DEF  
 ‘But the ship was full.’ (1210, Jarstein.779)
  - Ekki** vildi hertoginn annað en... (NEG-V-SUBJ)  
 NEG wish.PST Duke.DEF other than  
 ‘The Duke did not wish for anything other than...’  
 (1790, Finnbraedra.1279)
  - Gott** er þetta blessað veður. (NomPred-V-SUBJ)  
 good.NOM be.PST DEM.NOM blessed.NOM weather.NOM  
 ‘This blessed weather is good.’ (1902, Fossar.893)

- SF also occurs with an indefinite subject (presentationals), as in Modern Icelandic:

- (22) a. **Grímur** hét *einn bóndi*, mikils háttar  
 Grímur.NOM be-called.PST one.NOM farmer.NOM, great.GEN importance.GEN  
 og vel fjáreigandi.  
 and well wealthy.NOM  
 ‘There was a farmer named Grímur, of great importance and very wealthy.’  
 (1210, Jarstein.1)
- b. **Eigi** var *gull eða silfur* sparað við spjótin.  
 NEG be.PST gold.NOM or silver.NOM spare.PASS.PTCP with spear.DEF  
 ‘There was no sparing gold of silver with the spear.’ (1300, Alexander.380)
- c. **Vera** munu þar *nokkurir óvíglegri* en þú.  
 be.INF may there some.NOM more-unwarrior-like.NOM than you.NOM  
 ‘There may be some more unwarrior-like than you.’ (1450, Vilhjalmur.99.2040)

- SF also occurs in genuinely subjectless sentences (impersonals), again as in modern stage:

- (23) a. **Vakað** var í Reykjaholti.  
 wake.PASS.PTCP be.PST in Reykjaholt  
 ‘There was waking in Reykjaholt.’ (1250, Sturlunga.1850)
- b. en **dimmt** var úti.  
 but dark.NOM be.PST outside  
 ‘But it was dark outside.’ (1400, Gunnar.331)
- c. **Eigi** má svo vera.  
 NEG may so be.INF  
 ‘Things may not be so.’ (1275, Morkin.1401)

### 3.3 Some conclusions

- SF has a long history in Icelandic, with some continuity:
  - SF is attested in presentationals and impersonals throughout the diachrony.
- But SGC from the synchronic literature does not hold for earlier stages (or any stage...):
  - Throughout the diachrony, SF is dominant in sentences with a definite subject.
- Two possibilities:
  - Either, the literature is inaccurate and SF in matrix clauses with a definite subject is possible in Modern Icelandic.
  - Or we have a very recent change after centuries of stability, whereby SF is lost in contexts with a definite subject.
- Future work:
  - Synchronic survey of SF in matrix clauses, with specific attention to subject properties.

- At any rate:
  - The examples with a definite subject challenge previous analyses of SF which take it to be a strategy to satisfy V2 in sentences without a topic (Maling 1990).
  - We already have a subject which qualifies as a topic (definite subjects are typically ‘given’, and thus continuous topics).

## 4 What motivates Stylistic Fronting?

- The construction in question:

(24) SF – V – SUBJ<sub>+DEF</sub>

- Or in information-structural terms:

(25) SF – V – SUBJ<sub>TOPIC</sub>

- Also diachronically attested in embedded clauses:

- (26) a. Hét hún síðan á hinn sæla Þorlák biskup [að **finnast** skyldi  
 appeal.PST she.NOM then to DEF holy Þorlákur bishop COMP find.MID should  
*nistið*].  
 brooch.NOM.DEF  
 ‘She then appealed to the holy bishop Þorlákur that the brooch should be found.’  
 (1210, Jarstein.164)
- b. Þá var tekinn stafur sá [er **átt** hafði hinn  
 then be.PST take.PASS.PTCP staff.DEF DEF REL own.PST.PTCP have.PST DEF.NOM  
*sæli Þorlákur...*]  
 holy.NOM Þorlákur.NOM  
 ‘Then was taken the staff which the holy Þorlákur had owned...’ (1210, Jarstein.257)
- c. Og sér Oddur [að **annað** er veðrið út fyrir.]  
 and see.PRS Oddur COMP different.NOM be.PRS weather.NOM.DEF out there  
 ‘And Oddur sees that the weather is different out there.’ (1450, Bandamenn.44.960)
- d. Þar hafði ekki heldur örlað á ósamþykki, [þó  
 there have.PST NEG rather come-to-light.PST.PTCP on disagreement, although  
**lítill** væru *efnin*].  
 small.NOM be.PST.SBJV matters.NOM.DEF  
 ‘There had not come to light disagreement, though the matters were small.’  
 (1902, Fossar.224)
- e. Ég tók að þvo mér í ystu sturtunni, næst  
 I.NOM begin.PST to wash.INF I.DAT in outer.SUPL shower.DEF nearest  
 útgöngunni, [þó **ekki** sé *hún* mitt eftirlæti].  
 exit.DEF although NEG be.PRS.SBJV she.NOM my.NOM favourite.NOM  
 ‘I began to wash myself in the outermost shower, nearest the exit, although it is  
 not my favourite.’ (1985, Margsgaga.266)

## 4.1 Is it really Stylistic Fronting?

- These examples clearly flaunt the SGC as a criterion for SF, but what about other criteria from the literature?
- Other criteria from Maling (1990):

- SF is optional: YES – SF alternatives with V1 with a postfinite topical subject (‘narrative inversion V1’, Platzack 1985; Sigurðsson 1990)

- (27) a. **Heyra** vil ég hvorttveggja kvæðið. (SF-V-SUBJ<sub>TOPIC</sub>)  
 hear.INF wish.PRS I.NOM each.ACC verse.ACC  
 ‘I wish to hear each verse.’ (1275, Morkin.1196)
- b. Vil ég nú vita hver mikið... (V-SUBJ<sub>TOPIC</sub>)  
 wish.PRS I.NOM now know.INF how.ACC much.ACC  
 ‘I wish to know now how much...’  
 (1275, Morkin.1636)

- SF applies to heads not phrases: YES – numerous attested examples where the SF element is a head which strands its complement:

- (28) a. **Mælt** hefi eg það. (SF-V-SUBJ<sub>TOPIC</sub>-OBJ)  
 say.PST.PTCP have.PRS.SBJV I.NOM DEM.ACC  
 ‘I may have said that.’ (1250, Sturlunga.398.348)
- b. **Svikið** hefir þú oss Egill. (SF-V-SUBJ<sub>TOPIC</sub>-OBJ)  
 betray.PST.PTCP have.PRS you.NOM we.ACC Egill  
 ‘You have betrayed us, Egill.’ (1350, Bandamenn.103)

- SF is clause-bounded: YES – as far as we can tell...

- \* None of the examples involve SF of a category out of an embedded clause.
- \* Whereas XP-fronting across a clause boundary is generally possible:

- (29) [**Þau orð**] bað Ásta [at vit skyldim  
 DEM.ACC words.ACC ask.PST Ásta.NOM COMP we.DU.NOM should  
 bera þér.]  
 bring.INF you.DAT  
 ‘Ásta asked us to bring you these words.’ (Faarlund 2004:233)

- These examples seem to qualify as SF in the sense that it is optional, applies to heads and is clause-bounded.

## 4.2 Cross-linguistic comparison

- SF with a definite subject has been observed of other languages/language stages, esp. in embedded clauses:

– Old Swedish (Petzell 2017): SUBJ-SF-V is attested (see also Platzack 1988)

(30) ... þa han **ofra** wilde vm en høghtiðwa dagh  
as he sacrifice.INF want.PST on a high-time day  
'...as he wanted to sacrifice on a holiday.' (Petzell 2017:130)

– Old Catalan (Fischer & Alexiadou 2001; Fischer 2004): SUBJ-SF...-V is attested

(31) ... que Déus **donat** li havia.  
COMP God given him had.3SG  
(Fischer 2004:130)

- So the analysis that SF is a strategy to satisfy V2/occupy a topic position in topicless sentences is also challenged by data from other languages.
- Cross-linguistic investigation would be insightful...

## 4.3 Some fledgling thoughts...

- If SF is not purely structural, then what is it?
  - Could it be related to information structure?
- Some have argued that Modern Icelandic SF does have an information-structural effect:
  - Hrafnbjargarson (2004): SF can be a (contrastive) focus strategy (see also Molnár 2010).

(32) a. Bækur hafa verið lesnar. (No SF)  
books.NOM have.PRS be.PST.PTCP read.PASS.PTCP  
'Books have been read.'

(Just a statement about books having been read.)

b. **Lesnar** hafa verið bækur. (SF)  
read.PASS.PTCP have.PRS be.PST.PTCP books.NOM  
'Books have been READ.'

(Contrasted with a situation where books have not been read.)

(Hrafnbjargarson 2004)

- Egerland (2013): SF is a backgrounding strategy.
  - \* SF element is moved out of the focus domain.
  - \* It does not receive a focal or topical reading.
  - \* Rest of the clause is in focus.

- Two observations which might give us a clue:

1. ‘Pure’ auxiliaries (non-modals, e.g. perfect HAVE and passive BE) cannot undergo SF (Jónsson 1991; Holmberg 2006):

- (33) a. Þetta er versta bók [sem **skrifuð** hefur verið].  
 DEM be.PRS worst book REL write.PASS.PTCP have.PRS be.PST.PTCP  
 ‘This is the worst book which has been written.’  
 b. \*Þetta er versta bók [sem **verið** hefur skrifuð].  
 DEM be.PRS worst book REL be.PST.PTCP have.PRS write.PASS.PTCP  
 ‘This is the worst book which has been written.’  
 (Holmberg 2006)

- In the historical data, SF of perfect HAVE or passive BE is not attested.
- Suggests that an element needs to carry more semantic content than a pure auxiliary in order to be eligible for SF.
- If SF was just an ‘expletive’ strategy, then this semantic restriction would not follow (an expletive lacks semantics).
- Points towards an information structural motivation; the SF element has to have semantics in order to contribute to the discourse.

2. 62% (649/1042) of the SF-V-SUBJ<sub>def</sub> examples occur in direct speech.

- (34) Þorfinnur svarar: **Ekki** mun þér allt í augu blæða.  
 Þorfinnur answer.PRS NEG will you everything.ACC in eyes.ACC bleed.INF  
 ‘Þorfinnur answers: "You will not bleed everything into the eyes."’  
 (1310, Grettir.557)

- This is rather high, considering direct speech makes up just 15% of the total matrix clauses in the corpus (10,861/71,706).
- A literary strategy for imitating spoken language?
- Can we think about information-structural characteristics of direct speech which may give us a clue...?

- An information-structural account looks like it could be promising, but a closer study of the data is necessary..

## 5 Conclusion

- The claim that EXPL and SF are equivalent (purely structural) strategies for filling the prefield does not hold for historical Icelandic:
  - EXPL was always a topic position placeholder in topicless sentences.
  - SF was (apparently until very recently) a broader type of phenomenon; not just a topic position placeholder.

- > Franco (2009:144): SF in Modern Icelandic is ‘probably a residue of Old Icelandic word order.’
- The diachronic source of SF does not seem to be as an expletive.
- To account for SF historically we must look for a different motivation....
- Outstanding questions:
  - What motivates SF with a definite subject?
  - What insights can we get from cross-linguistic data?
  - What would an information-structural account of SF look like?
  - Why does the Subject Gap Condition on SF suddenly arise after such a long period of stability (if indeed it does at all...)?

## References

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