

Presentational sentences in Icelandic and Swedish: Roles and positions

Elisabet Engdahl, Joan Maling, Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson and
Annie Zaenen⁰

Abstract

In this article we report on a systematic comparison of presentational sentences in Icelandic and Swedish, looking in particular at possible thematic roles of the pivot and how they correlate with positional options. Despite some well-known differences between the languages (only Icelandic allows ‘high’ IP-pivots and pivots with transitive verbs), it turns out that the restrictions on VP-pivots are similar, both in terms of roles and positions. VP-pivots have to be Themes and may co-occur with other DPs, but only if the pivot is the last DP argument. We show how these restrictions to some extent reflect the argument structure proposed in Platzack (2010). In addition we show that we need to distinguish presentational sentences among the different Transitive Expletive Constructions discussed in Håkansson (2017).

1 Introduction

Word order in Icelandic and Swedish has received a lot of attention primarily among syntacticians in the last forty years or so, see e.g. Thráinsson (1979), Holmberg & Platzack (1995), Maling & Zaenen (1990), Vikner (1995) and Thráinsson (2007). In this article we focus on presentational sentences in Icelandic and Swedish with the aim of comparing how thematic roles and clause structure interact in these languages. In Section 2 we summarize the main differences, drawing in addition on previous research by Platzack (1983), Sigurðsson (2000) and Vangsnes (2002). In Section 3 we give an overview of the constraints on thematic roles that are relevant, building on Maling (1988), Zaenen et al. (2017) and Engdahl et al. (to appear). In Section 4 we analyse the patterns that emerge with the help of the argument structure proposed in Platzack (2010). Certain more marked constructions are discussed in Sections 5 and 6, before we conclude and point out directions for future research in Section 7.¹

⁰University of Gothenburg, Brandeis University, Lund University and Stanford University.

¹We are grateful to the audiences at *Grammar in Focus*, February 2018 in Lund and *the 11th Nordic Dialectologist conference*, August 2018 in Reykjavík for comments and suggestions, especially Lars-Olof Delsing, Cecilia Falk, Gunlög Josefsson, David Petersson, Jóhannes Gísli Jónsson and Øystein Vangsnes. Thanks to Peter Andersson, Maia Andréasson, Kristian Blenselius, Linnéa Bäckström, Benjamin Lyngfelt, Erik Petzell and Henrik Rosenkvist for help with the Swedish data and to Einar Freyr Sigurðsson, Höskuldur Thráinsson, Sigríður Magnúsdóttir and Sigríður Sigurjónsdóttir for help with the Icelandic data.

2 Main differences

By presentational sentences we understand sentences that assert the existence of a referent or present a hitherto unmentioned referent in a situation.² Presentational sentences typically have an expletive early in the sentence and an indefinite DP later. We will refer to this indefinite DP as the **pivot**.³ Presentational sentences in Icelandic and Swedish share certain fundamental properties but there are some well-known differences. The pivot in Icelandic can appear either in the VP or (in several positions) in the higher IP domain (examples from Thráinsson (2007, 314)).

- (1) a. Það hafði alltaf verið **einhver köttur** í eldhúsinu.
EXPL *had always been some.NOM cat.NOM in kitchen.DEF*
'There had always been a cat in the kitchen.'
- b. Það hafði alltaf **einhver köttur** verið í eldhúsinu..
EXPL *had always some.NOM cat.NOM been in kitchen.DEF*
- c. Það hafði **einhver köttur** alltaf verið í eldhúsinu.
EXPL *had some.NOM cat.NOM always been in kitchen.DEF*

In this article we will mainly be concerned with differences between pivots inside the VP, which we refer to as VP-pivots, and pivots in the IP, which we refer to as IP-pivots (see Sigurðsson (2000); Vangsnes (2002) and Thráinsson (2007) for detailed discussion about the types of DPs which may appear as IP-pivots). For this reason we consistently use examples with auxiliaries or modal verbs in order to show the different pivot positions since it is not possible to distinguish them when there is only a main verb in second position. We note that presentational sentences are very sensitive to context. They tend to require locative or temporal anchors and they are often better with modal or inferential particles. Nevertheless we sometimes use simple constructed examples to bring out a distinction, for ease of comparison.

In Swedish only the position inside the VP is generally available:

- (2) a. Det har varit **en katt** i köket.
EXPL *has been a cat in kitchen.DEF*
'There has been a cat in the kitchen.'
- b. *Det har **en katt** varit i köket.
EXPL *has a cat been in kitchen.DEF*

²Other terms for presentational sentences are 'existential sentences' and *there*-insertion constructions, see e.g. Milsark (1974) and Sundman (1980).

³In the examples, pivots are shown in bold. Other terms for pivots are 'logical subject' and 'associate (of the expletive)'.

In Icelandic, IP-pivots with transitive verbs are possible, see (3).⁴

- (3) a. *Það hafa einhverjir stúdentar stungið smjörinu í vasann.*
 EXPL have some students put butter.DEF in pocket.DEF
 ‘Some students have put the butter in their pockets.’
- b. **Það hafa stungið einhverjir stúdentar smjörinu í vasann.*
 EXPL have put some students butter.DEF in pocket.DEF
- c. **Það hafa stungið smjörinu einhverjir stúdentar í vasann.*
 EXPL have put butter.DEF some students in pocket.DEF
- d. *Það hafa stungið smjörinu í vasann einhverjir stúdentar.*
 EXPL have put butter.DEF in pocket.DEF some students

As shown by the fact that (3b,c) are ungrammatical, VP-pivots are not possible with transitive verbs which have Agent subjects; however, as we will see, they are possible with nonagentive dyadic predicates, see (14). (3d), where the pivot appears after the locative argument, is presumably a case of Heavy NP Shift of an IP-pivot. We try to avoid examples involving Heavy NP Shift.

The corresponding Swedish examples are all impossible:

- (4) a. **Det har några studenter stoppat smöret i fickan.*
 EXPL has some students put butter.DEF in pocket.DEF
- b. **Det har stoppat några studenter smöret i fickan.*
 EXPL has put some students butter.DEF in pocket.DEF
- c. **Det har stoppat smöret i fickan några studenter.*
 EXPL has put butter.DEF in pocket.DEF some students

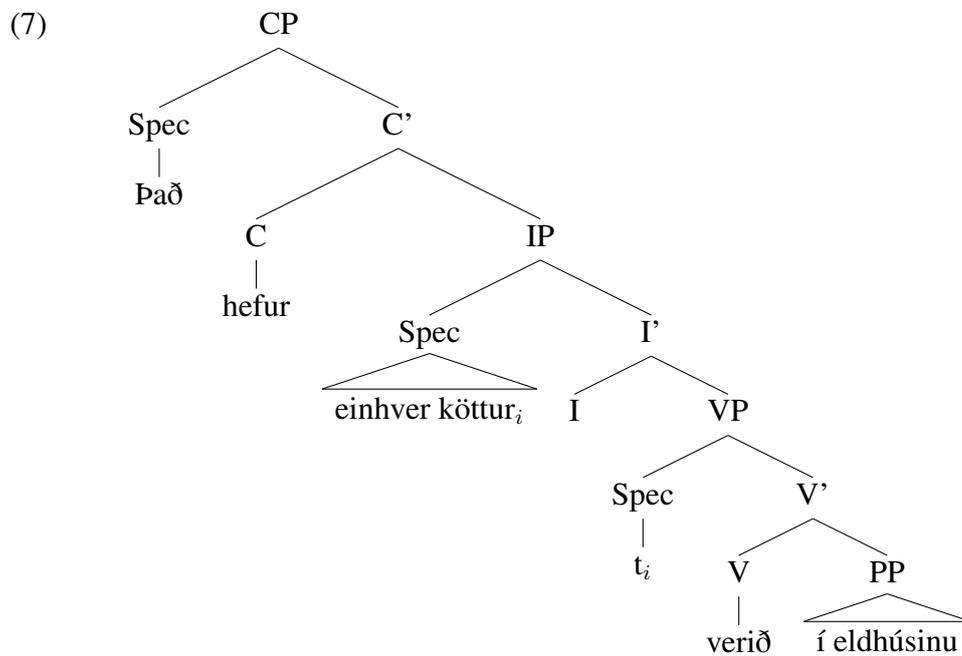
Ever since Platzack (1983) it has been customary to account for both these differences, i.e. that only Icelandic allows IP-pivots and transitive verbs, by assuming that the expletives are generated in different positions. The Icelandic expletive is assumed to be generated initially, in Spec,CP, and the Swedish expletive in Spec,IP or Spec,VP (see e.g. Sigurðsson (1991), Sigurðsson (2000), Christensen (1991), Vikner (1995), Vangsnes (2002), Thráinsson (2007), Platzack (2010)).⁵ Support for this account comes from the fact that the Icelandic presentational expletive *það* only appears in Spec,CP, not sentence internally, in the IP, whereas the Swedish *det* is normally required in Spec,IP and consequently blocks pivots from appearing there.

⁴This famous example first occurred in print in Platzack (1983) but is due to Höskuldur Thráinsson who heard it in the teachers’ coffee room in Árnagarður. See also Thráinsson (1986, 245). Icelandic Transitive Expletive Constructions have been widely discussed in the generative literature, see in particular Bobaljik & Jonas (1996). See also Håkansson (2017) and the references there.

⁵Sigurðsson (2010) develops another analysis in terms of feature matching, but the differences are not crucial for this article.

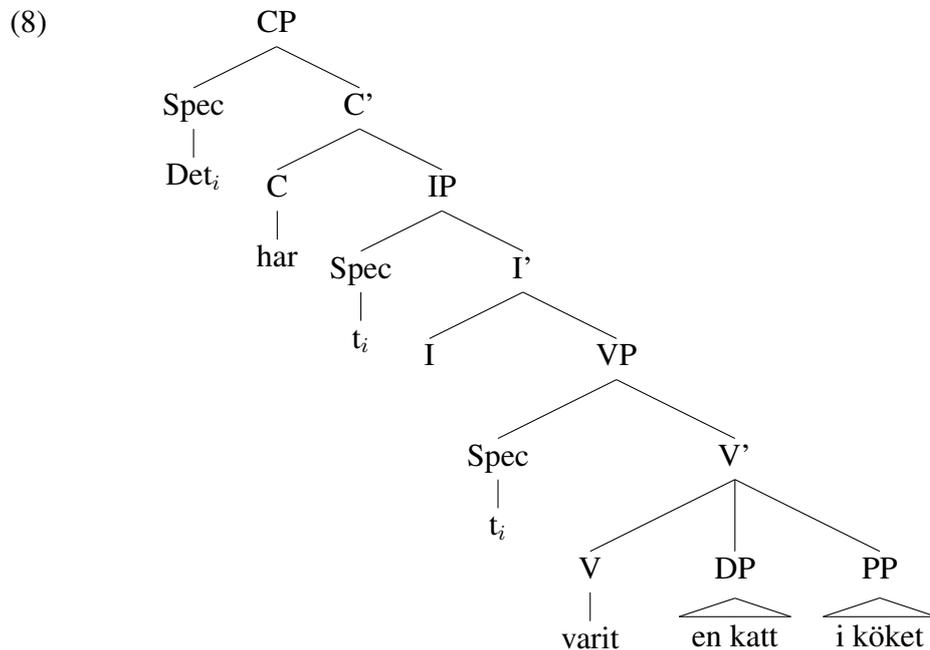
- (5) Hefur (*það) verið **einhver köttur** í eldhúsinu?
has EXPL been some cat in kitchen.DEF
 ‘Has there been a cat in the kitchen?’
- (6) Har *(det) varit **en katt** i köket?
has EXPL been a cat in kitchen.DEF
 ‘Has there been a cat in the kitchen?’

The simplified trees in (7) and (8) illustrate this.⁶ In the Icelandic tree, the expletive *það* is generated in Spec,CP and the pivot *einhver köttur* ‘some cat’ is first generated in Spec,VP and then raised to Spec,IP.



In the Swedish tree, the expletive *det* is generated in Spec,VP and then raised, first to Spec,IP and then to Spec,CP.

⁶We here leave out the raising of the auxiliary to C and the internal structure of the VP.



The evidence for assuming that the expletive in Swedish is generated in Spec,VP, comes from data like (9) where the expletive appears in an untensed small clause:

- (9) Vi såg det komma **några barn** på vägen.
we saw EXPL come some children on road.DEF
 ‘We saw some children come on the road.’

In addition to these differences, Maling (1988) showed that there are additional thematic and positional restrictions on the pivot in both languages and we now take a closer look at these, starting with the thematic role constraints.

3 Thematic role constraints

There are some studies looking at what types of verbs are used in presentational sentences in the Scandinavian languages, see e.g. Sundman (1980), Askedal (1986) and Sveen (1996). Ekberg (1990) looks at theta roles, more specifically at the locative argument. Here we concentrate on the thematic role of the pivot, limiting ourselves to the most common ones, Theme, Experiencer, Goal and Agent.⁷

Theme pivots

Presentational sentences often have verbs that express existence, appearance and disappearance. These verbs tend to be unaccusative and the single argument is a

⁷Engdahl et al. (to appear) investigates in addition Cause, Instrument and Stimulus in Swedish.

Theme. In Icelandic, the pivot has the same case as it has as an ordinary subject, Zaenen et al. (1985), Sigurðsson (1989), Zaenen et al. (2017). The verb *sökkva* ‘sink’ takes a nominative subject and the pivot is also nominative, as shown in (10), whereas the verb *reka* ‘drift, strand’ takes an accusative subject, as shown in (11).

- (10) a. *Bátarnir höfðu sokkið.*
boats.NOM.DEF had sunk
 ‘The boats had sunk.’
 b. *Það höfðu sokkið margir bátar.*
EXPL had sunk many.NOM boats.NOM
 ‘Many boats had sunk.’
- (11) a. *Nökkra hvali hefur rekið á land í nótt.*
several.ACC whales.ACC has drifted to land in night
 ‘Several whales have stranded overnight.’
 b. *Það hefur rekið nokkra hvali á land í nótt.*
EXPL has drifted several.ACC whales.ACC to land in night

In modern Swedish, nouns are not case marked so it is harder to tell what the case of the pivot is. In those few cases where case is realized, the pivot has nominative case.⁸ In some dialects spoken in the area north of Lake Siljan, the distinction between nominative and accusative is still upheld and the pivot is in the nominative as shown in the following example from Orsa taken from Ringmar & Olander (2018).

- (12) a. *E kum je kulla dar.*
EXPL comes a.NOM girl.NOM there
 ‘There comes a girl there.’
 b. *I sjår jena kullu dar.*
I see a.ACC girl.ACC there
 ‘I see a girl there.’

Most verbs that take a Theme argument are intransitive, but there are some non-agentive transitive verbs which allow Theme pivots (Platzack (1983), Malting (1988)). Interestingly these verbs allow two arguments in the VP, unlike the agentive transitive verbs shown in (3) and (4). We return to these shortly.

- (13) *Det hade hänt henne något konstigt.*
EXPL had happened her something
 ‘Something strange had happened to her.’

⁸See e.g. Teleman et al. (1999, Vol 3, 387), Zaenen et al. (2017, 268).

- (14) Það hafði hent hana **eitthvað** **skrýtið**.
 EXPL *had happened her.ACC something.NOM strange*
 ‘Something strange had happened to her.’

Experiencer pivots

As pointed out in Maling (1988), Experiencers are infelicitous as pivots in Swedish, see (15a). The verb *frysa* ‘freeze’ can also take an inanimate Theme argument which is fine as a pivot, (15b).

- (15) a. *Det har frusit **några barn** i lägret.
 EXPL *have frozen some children in camp.DEF*
 Intended: ‘Some children have felt cold in the camp.’
 b. Det har frusit **några vattenledningar** i källaren.
 EXPL *have frozen some water-pipes in basement*
 ‘Some water pipes have frozen in the basement.’

Testing whether the same contrast arises in Icelandic turns out to be complicated by the fact that the change of thematic roles tends to go together with a change in case.⁹

The generalization for Icelandic seems to be that where there is a choice between VP- and IP-pivots, Experiencer IP-pivots are preferred, both with adjectives, as in (16), and with verbs ((16) and (17) from Maling (1988, 184f.):

- (16) a. Það hefur **mörgum börnum** verið kalt.
 EXPL *has many.DAT children.DAT been cold*
 ‘Many children have felt cold.’

⁹ For example, the Experiencer pivot in (1a) is dative whereas the Theme pivot in (1b) is accusative.

- (1) a. Það hafði hitnað **nokkrum börnum** í sólskininu það mikið að þau
 EXPL *had heated some.DAT children.DAT in sunshine.DEF so much that they*
 urðu veik.
became ill
 Intended: ‘Some children had got so warm in the sunshine that they became ill.’
 b. Það höfðu hitnað **nokkrar vatnsleiðslur** það mikið að ekki var hægt að
 EXPL *had heated some.ACC water-pipes.ACC so much that not was possible to*
 snerta þær.
touch them
 ‘Some water pipes had got so warm that it wasn’t possible to touch them.’

HÁS finds (1b) with a Theme pivot slightly less unnatural than (1a) but thinks both examples are stilted and probably better with IP-pivots.

- b. ?*Það hefur verið **mörgum börnum** kalt.
EXPL *has been many.DAT children.DAT cold*
- (17) a. Það hafa **margin** lögreglumenn óttast fjölgun
EXPL *have many.NOM policemen.NOM feared increase.ACC*
slysa.
accidents.GEN
'Many policemen have feared an increase of accidents.'
- b. *Það hafa óttast **margin** lögreglumenn fjölgun
EXPL *have feared many.NOM policemen.NOM increase.ACC*
slysa.
accidents.GEN
- (18) a. Það hefur bara **fjórum stúdentum** leiðst þetta.
EXPL *has only four.DAT students.DAT been-annoyed this*
'Only four students have been annoyed at this.'
- b. *Það hefur bara leiðst **fjórum stúdentum** þetta.
EXPL *has only been-annoyed four.DAT students.DAT this*

Note that the restriction pertains to the pivot: an Experiencer can only marginally be realized as a VP-pivot. But it is OK to have a presentational sentence with a VP-internal Experiencer as long as there is a Theme pivot, as shown in (13) for Swedish and in (14) for Icelandic, repeated below. However, if we make the Theme argument definite, thereby forcing the indefinite Experiencer to be interpreted as the pivot, the result is ungrammatical in both languages.

- (19) a. Det hade hänt henne **något konstigt**.
EXPL *had happened her something strange*
'Something strange had happened to her.'
- b. *Det hade hänt **många** den konstiga saken.
EXPL *had happened many the strange thing.DEF*
Intended: 'Many people had experienced the strange thing.'
- (20) a. Það hafði hent hana **eitthvað skrítið**.
EXPL *had happened her.ACC something.NOM strange*
'Something strange had happened to her.'
- b. *Það hafði hent **marga menn** skrítni hluturinn
EXPL *had happened many.ACC men.ACC strange thing.DEF*
Intended: 'Many men had experienced the strange thing.'
- c. *Það hafði **marga menn** hent skrítni hluturinn
EXPL *had many.ACC men.ACC happened strange thing.DEF*

Note that the version with Experiencer IP-pivot is also ungrammatical here, (20c), unlike the cases we looked at before, (16)–(18). This shows a further restriction on pivots, namely that only the argument that is realised as subject in an ordinary, non-presentational, sentence is felicitous as a pivot.¹⁰ The verb *henda* ‘happen’ normally takes the Theme argument as subject, (21), and this argument may also be realised as a pivot, either as a VP-pivot (20a) or IP-pivot (21b).

- (21) a. Eitthvað skrýtið hafði hent hana.
something strange had happened her.ACC
 ‘Something strange had happened to her.’
 b. Það hafði **eitthvað skrýtið** hent hana.
EXPL had something strange happened her.ACC
 ‘Something strange had happened to her.’

This means that it is possible to have more than one argument in the VP in active presentational sentences in both Swedish and Icelandic provided that the pivot is a Theme. In Swedish there is a clear difference between (22a) with a Theme pivot and (22b) with an Agent pivot.

- (22) a. Det hade slagit henne **en tanke**.
EXPL had struck her a thought
 ‘A thought had struck her.’
 b. *Det hade slagit henne **en polis**.
EXPL had hit her a police-officer

This contrast is not as clear in Icelandic since some speakers find (23b) almost as acceptable as (23c) with an agentive IP-pivot.

- (23) a. Það hafði slegið hana **óhugur**.
EXPL had struck her dejection
 ‘Dejection had struck her.’
 b. (?) Það hafði slegið hana **einhver lögreglumaður**.
EXPL had hit her some police-officer
 ‘Some police officer had hit her.’
 c. Það hafði **einhver lögreglumaður** slegið hana.
EXPL had some police-officer hit her
 ‘Some police officer had hit her.’

Given that we here have a long pivot and a short pronominal object, it seems likely that some kind of “heaviness balance” may be at play, as discussed with respect to Stylistic Fronting in Sigurðsson (2017). See also Indriðadóttir (2017).

¹⁰This restriction is mentioned in Maling (1988) who illustrates it with the verbs *óttast* ‘fear’ and *hræða* ‘frighten’.

Goal pivots

Goal arguments are not acceptable as pivots at all in Swedish and in Icelandic only as IP-pivots, as shown in Maling (1988). The pattern is clear with transaction verbs there the Goal argument simultaneously is a Recipient, see the Swedish example in (24) and the Icelandic minimal pair in (25).

- (24) *Det hade mottagit **en student** priset.
EXPL *have received a student prize*.DEF
- (25) a. Það hafa **nokkrir** fengið verðlaunin.
EXPL *have some.NOM received prize*.ACC.DEF
'Some people have received the prize.'
b. *Það hafa fengið **nokkrir** verðlaunin.
EXPL *have received some.NOM prize*.ACC.DEF

Passive versions of ditransitive verbs have two arguments in the VP. In Swedish only the version where the Theme argument is the pivot is grammatical; (26b) with an indefinite Goal pivot is ungrammatical.

- (26) a. Det hade tilldelats studenten **ett pris**.
EXPL *had award*.PASS *student*.DEF *a prize*
'The student had been awarded a prize.'
b. *Det hade tilldelats **en student** priset.
EXPL *had award*.PASS *a student prize*.DEF
Intended: 'A student had been awarded the prize.'

In Icelandic it is also possible to have two arguments in the VP if the Theme argument is the pivot. (27a) is grammatical and the Theme is interpreted as the pivot. If we block this interpretation by making the Theme argument definite, the example is ungrammatical, (27b). The version with an IP-pivot is OK, (27c), as expected.

- (27) a. Það höfðu verið gefnar einhverjum lögreglumanni
EXPL *had*.PL *been given*.PL.NOM *some* *police-man*.DAT
fjórar stolnar bækur.
four stolen books.PL.NOM
'Four stolen books had been given to some police man.'
b. *Það höfðu verið gefnar **einhverjum lögreglumanni**
EXPL *had*.PL *been given*.PL.NOM *some* *police-man*.DAT
þessar bækur.
these books.PL.NOM
Intended: 'These books had been given to some police man.'

- c. Það höfðu **einhverjum lögreglumanni** verið gefnar
 EXPL *had.PL some* *police-man.DAT been given.PL.NOM*
 þessar bækur.
these books.PL.NOM
 ‘These books had been given to some police man.’

In (27) the verb *höfðu* agrees in number and the participle *gefnar* agrees in number and case with the nominative pivot. In (28), where the pivot is dative, there is default third person singular agreement.¹¹ This may be the reason why some speakers find (28a) easier to judge than (27a).

- (28) a. Það hafði verið skilað **einhverjum lögreglumanni fjórum**
 EXPL *had.SG been returned.SG some* *police-man.DAT four*
stolnum bókum.
stolen books.PL.DAT
 ‘Four stolen books had been returned to some police man.’
- b. *Það hafði verið skilað **einhverjum lögreglumanni**
 EXPL *had.SG been returned.SG some* *police-man.DAT*
 þessum bókum.
these books.PL.DAT
 Intended: ‘These books had been returned to some police man.’
- c. Það hafði **einhverjum lögreglumanni** verið skilað
 EXPL *had.SG some* *police-man.DAT been returned.SG*
 þessum bókum.
these books.PL.DAT
 ‘These books had been returned to some police man.’

Goals/recipients with transaction verbs hence behave like Experiencers; they are not possible as pivots in Swedish and only possible as IP-pivots in Icelandic. Malting (1988) found a similar pattern with the Icelandic verbs *hjálpa* ‘help’ and *þakka* ‘thank’ which have been analysed as taking a Goal argument. However, with these verbs there is variation. Some speakers accept VP-pivots in addition to IP-pivots.

- (29) a. Það var **gömlum manni** hjálpað yfir götuna.
 EXPL *was old.DAT man.DAT helped across street.DEF*
 ‘An old man was helped across the street.’
- b. ok/?* Það var hjálpað **gömlum manni** yfir götuna.
 EXPL *was helped old.DAT man.DAT across street.DEF*

¹¹On agreement in passives, see Zaenen et al. (1985) and Thráinsson (2007, 134ff.).

Platzack (2005) suggests that an affected Goal can be reanalysed as a Patient, i.e. an affected Theme. This could explain the variation with these verbs (cf. Maling (2001)). The cognate Swedish verb *hjälpa* is fine with a pivot.

- (30) Det skulle hjälpas **en man** över gatan.
 EXPL *should help*.PASS *a man over street*.DEF
 ‘There was a man who needed to be helped across the street.’

“Agent” pivots

As first pointed out in Anward (1981), pivots with unergative verbs are possible in Swedish but only with “reduced agentivity” (Teleman et al. (1999, 3:400f.), Zaenen et al. (2017), Engdahl et al. (to appear)). It is, for instance, infelicitous to add subject oriented adverbs to a presentational sentence with a verb like *arbeta* ‘work’.

- (31) a. Det har arbetat **2000 människor** här.
 EXPL *has worked 2000 people here*
 ‘2000 people have worked here.’
 b. Det har (?*motvilligt) arbetat **2000 människor** (?*motvilligt)
 EXPL *has (reluctantly) worked 2000 people (reluctantly)*
 här.
here
 Intended: ‘2000 people have reluctantly worked here.’

A verb like *sjunga* ‘sing’ can appear both with an ordinary subject (32a) and in a presentational construction (32b), but a manner adverb is only felicitous in the former case.

- (32) a. Många islänningar hade sjungit entusiastiskt på matchen.
many Icelanders had sung enthusiastically at game.DEF
 ‘Many Icelanders had sung enthusiastically at the game.’
 b. Det hade sjungit **många islänningar** (?*entusiastiskt) på
 EXPL *had sung many Icelanders enthusiastically at*
 matchen.
game.DEF

If the subject is in Spec,CP or Spec,IP, it is possible to add a degree modifier as in (33a), but not to the presentational version. This applies both to unergative verbs like *arbeta* ‘work’ and to motion verbs like *springa* ‘run’.

- (33) a. Barnen hade sprungit mycket på gräsmattan.
children.DEF had run a-lot on lawn.DEF
 ‘The children had run around a lot on the lawn.’
 b. *Det hade sprungit **några barn** mycket på gräsmattan.
EXPL had run some children a-lot on lawn.DEF

In Icelandic both IP and VP-pivots are possible with these verbs, as shown in (34).

- (34) a. Það hefur **margt fólk** unnið hér.
EXPL has a-lot-of people worked here
 ‘Many people have worked here.’
 b. Það hefur unnið **margt fólk** hér.
EXPL has worked a-lot-of people here

But there is a preference for IP-pivots when the agentivity is emphasized through an adverb or modifier.

- (35) a. Það hefur **margt fólk** unnið hér gegn vilja sínum.
EXPL has a-lot-of people worked here against will their.REFL
 ‘Many people have worked here reluctantly.’
 b. ?Það hefur unnið **margt fólk** hér gegn vilja sínum.
EXPL has worked a-lot-of people here against will their.REFL
- (36) a. Það hafa **nokkrir Íslendingar** sungið af innlifun í hverjum leik.
EXPL have some Icelanders sung of empathy in every game
 ‘Some Icelanders have sung enthusiastically at every game.’
 b. ?Það hafa sungið **nokkrir Íslendingar** af innlifun í hverjum leik.
EXPL have sung many Icelanders of empathy in every game
- (37) a. Það hefur **margt fólk** unnið mikið hér.
EXPL has a-lot-of people worked a-lot here
 ‘A lot of people have worked here.’
 b. ?Það hefur unnið **margt fólk** mikið hér.
EXPL has worked a-lot-of people a-lot here

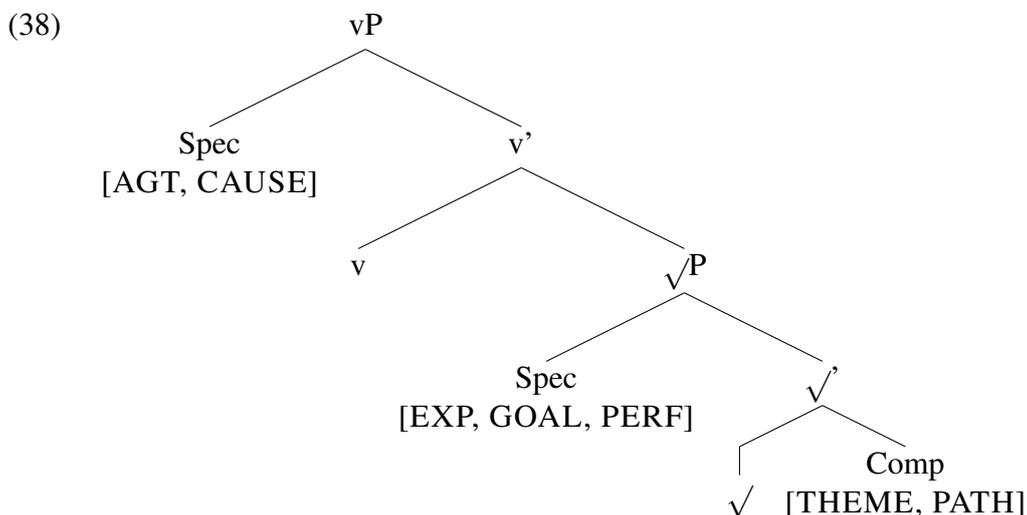
Comparing Swedish and Icelandic, it turns out that readings which are unavailable in Swedish are available in Icelandic, but only with IP-pivots. Compare the b-versions of the Swedish examples in (31)–(33) with the a-versions of the Icelandic examples in (35)–(37).

Summary

The overview has shown that the same thematic restrictions apply to VP-pivots in both languages. Theme pivots are in general possible whereas Experiencers and Goals are infelicitous. Since Swedish only allows VP-pivots, this means that some intended messages cannot be expressed as presentational sentences, see e.g. (15a) and (24). In Icelandic, which has the option of IP-pivots, the corresponding sentences are OK with IP-pivots, see (16) and (25). For both languages the generalization holds that if there is more than one DP in VP, then only Theme pivots are available and they have to follow other DPs, see e.g. (19) and (20). As for pivots of unergative verbs, these are OK as VP-pivots in both languages as long as the agentivity of the pivot is not highlighted, see (31)–(33) and (35)–(37). Next we turn to how these patterns can be accounted for, starting from the argument structure proposed in Platzack (2010).

4 Platzack's argument structure

In his comprehensive overview of the grammar of Swedish, Christer Platzack assumes a basic structure with a Root phrase (\sqrt{P}), dominated by vP, as shown in (38) Platzack (2010, 175).¹² Families of thematic roles are linked to complement and specifier positions in the tree as indicated.



On Platzack's Minimalist account, arguments are (first) merged in these positions and then moved further up, in order to check various features. In non-presentational sentences, the highest argument is normally raised to a Spec position in IP or CP. Presentational sentences in Swedish arise when an expletive

¹²A shorter English version is found in Platzack (2009).

is merged in Spec,vP, i.e. the position reserved for Agents of transitive verbs, and then raised. Consequently, no other Agent can be merged there and we don't find any transitive presentational sentences. In Icelandic, where the expletive is merged in Spec,CP, Agents can be merged in Spec,vP and then raise to become IP-pivots.

Building on Christensen (2010), Platzack assumes that intransitive verbs of motion and position don't take Agent arguments since only transitive verbs have Agents. Instead the argument of motion verbs is merged in the specifier of the root and bears the role *Performer*.¹³

- (39) **Performer:** the actant who carries out the action or the movement or assumes the position that the verb refers to, e.g. *springa* 'run', *sitta* 'sit', *stá* 'stand'.

A Theme argument is merged in the complement of the root where also Path arguments can appear. The root may be predicated of its complement but not of its specifier which gives us a way of distinguishing Performers from Themes and Paths (Platzack (2010, 177)). Compare the grammatical (40a), where the verb is predicated of the Path argument, with the ungrammatical (40b).

- (40) a. en sprungin sträcka (a run distance)
 b. *en sprungin pojke (a run boy)

A verb like *springa* 'run' can take both a Performer and a Path argument, provided that the Performer is raised and realised as an ordinary subject, (41a); the presentational version in (41b) is ungrammatical.

- (41) a. Några pojkar har sprungit en mil.
some boys have run a mile
 'Some boys have run a mile.'
 b. *Det har sprungit **några pojkar** en mil.
 EXPL *have run some boys a mile*
 c. Det har sprungit **några pojkar** på vägen.
 EXPL *have run some boys on road.DEF*
 'Some boys have run on the road.'

Given the argument structure in (38), it is somewhat surprising that (41b) is unavailable since there are two argument positions available in the vP. Recall, however, the generalization from section 3 that when there is more than one argument in the VP (now vP), only Theme pivots are available. The data in (41)

¹³ Christensen (2010) refers to this role as *Materialitet*. We follow Sigurðsson (1989, 320ff.) and call it *Performer*.

suggests that we rephrase this in the following way: a pivot has to be the *last DP argument* in the vP. As (41c) shows, a pivot may still be followed by a PP.¹⁴

A similar pattern shows up with cognate objects. A verb like *sjunga* ‘sing’ takes a Performer and a Theme argument, as shown by the predication test in (42).

- (42) a. en sjungen sǫng (a sung song)
 b. *en sjungen kvinna (a sung woman)

Both Performer and Theme may be realised in an ordinary sentence, (43a), but not in a presentational sentence (43b). As expected, (43c), where the pivot is followed by a locative, is OK.

- (43) a. Kvinnorna hade sjungit psalmer i kyrkan.
women.DEF had sung psalms in church.DEF
 ‘The women had sung psalms in the church.’
 b. *Det hade sjungit **några kvinnor** psalmer i kyrkan.
EXPL had sung some women psalms in church.DEF
 c. Det hade sjungit **några kvinnor** i kyrkan.
EXPL had sung some women in church.DEF
 ‘Some women had sung in the church.’

The Icelandic verbs *hlaupa* ‘run’ and *syngja* ‘sing’ behave in the same way as the Swedish verbs with respect to the predication test.

- (44) a. hlaupna vegalengdin (the run distance)
 b. *hlaupnu strákar (the run boys)
 c. sungnu sálmarnir (sung psalms)
 d. *sungnu konurnar (sung women)

The Path and the Theme arguments may co-occur with an ordinary subject, as well as with an IP-pivot, but not with a VP-pivot.

- (45) a. Einhverjir strákar hafa hlaupið (eina) mílu.
some boys have run a mile
 ‘Some boys have run a mile.’
 b. Það hafa víst **einhverjir strákar** hlaupið mílu.
EXPL have they-say some boys run mile
 ‘Apparently some boys have run a mile.’

¹⁴The wording *last DP argument* was chosen since it means it is not necessary to determine whether locatives are arguments or adjuncts in certain cases.

- c. **Það hafa víst hlaupið einhverjir strákar mílu.*
EXPL *have they-say run some boys mile*
- (46) a. *Konurnar höfðu sungið sálma í kirkjunni.*
women.DEF had sung psalms in church.DEF
'The women had sung psalms in the church.'
- b. *Það höfðu víst einhverjar konur sungið sálma í kirkjunni.*
EXPL *had they-say some women sung psalms in church.DEF*
'Apparently some women had sung psalms in the church.'
- c. **Það höfðu víst sungið einhverjar konur sálma í kirkjunni.*
EXPL *had they-say sung some women psalms in church.DEF*
- d. *Það höfðu víst sungið einhverjar konur í kirkjunni.*
EXPL *had they-say sung some women in church.DEF*
'Some women had apparently sung in the church.'

In the section on "Agent" pivots, we pointed out that they are only possible as VP-pivots if the agentivity is played down. Given the structure in (38) and the data presented in this section, it seems better to analyse them as Performers, i.e. as merged in the specifier of the root rather than in the specifier of vP. By analysing them as Performers, and not as Agents, we have an explanation for how come presentationals with verbs like *arbета* 'work' and *sjunga* 'sing' are possible in Swedish, see (31) and (32), whereas examples with Agents of true transitive verbs like *stoppa* 'put' are not (4). Furthermore we can retain the difference with respect to where the expletive is merged: in Spec,vP for Swedish and Spec,CP for Icelandic. In addition it is no longer surprising that an Agent argument of a transitive verb cannot appear in the vP in Icelandic, as shown in (3b,c), repeated here as (47).

- (47) a. **Það hafa stungið einhverjir stúdentar smjörinu í vasann.*
EXPL *have put some students butter.DEF in pocket.DEF*
- b. **Það hafa stungið smjörinu einhverjir stúdentar í vasann.*
EXPL *have put butter.DEF some students in pocket.DEF*

Given the structure in (38), an Agent argument is merged in the specifier of vP, i.e. initial in the vP, which excludes both the ungrammatical examples in (47), assuming, as Platzack does, that the verb is merged in v. Furthermore, (47a) violates the pattern we have observed several times, viz. that a pivot has to be the

last argument in the vP. At present we don't have a good account for this but we note that in both Swedish and Icelandic, the last argument in the vP often carries the main sentence accent, especially in utterances with wide focus. Presentational sentences typically involve wide focus and the main accent normally falls on the pivot.

Overall we find that Platzack's argument structure in (38) provides a good starting point for analysing the possible word orders in presentational sentences in both languages. However, we have not attempted to spell out what a similar argument structure for Icelandic would look like when you also take into consideration the case marking associated with the different verb types.

5 Negated IP-pivots

Up until now we have ignored the fact that IP-pivots are actually possible in Danish, Norwegian and Swedish as well, in particular with negated phrases, see e.g. Ljunggren (1926), Wallin (1936), Platzack (1983), Christensen (1991, 148f.), Teleman et al. (1999, 2:432ff.) and Engels (2010).¹⁵

- (48) a. Det har **ingen** varit här. Wallin (1936, 368)
 EXPL *has nobody been here*
 'There has been nobody here.'
- b. Det har inte varit **någon** här.
 EXPL *has not been anybody here*
 'There hasn't been anybody here.'
- c. *Det har varit **ingen** här.
 EXPL *has been nobody here*
- d. *Det har inte **någon** varit här.
 EXPL *has not anybody been here*

(48a) is an alternative to the probably more common (48b). A DP with incorporated negation is not possible in the vP, (48c), and negation + indefinite is not possible in the IP, (48d). Icelandic behaves similarly, but note that the indefinite *neinn* is possible as a low IP-pivot, (49d).¹⁶

¹⁵These are similar to objects with incorporated negation which have to be placed before a non-finite verb (see e.g. Engels (2012); Engdahl (2017)).

- (1) Jag har ingenting sagt.
I have nothing said
 'I haven't said anything.'

¹⁶Note that *neinn* is not possible in Spec,vP:

- (49) a. Það hefur **enginn** verið hér.
EXPL *has nobody been here*
'There has been nobody here.'
- b. Það hefur ekki verið **neinn** hér.
EXPL *has not been anybody here*
'There hasn't been anybody here.'
- c. *Það hefur verið **enginn** hér.
EXPL *has been nobody here*
- d. Það mun ekki **neinn** hafa verið hér.
EXPL *will not anybody have been here*
'There won't have been anybody here.'

Engels (2010, 126ff.), assumes that in negated clauses, pivots could appear in a separate position, SpecNegP above vP, in all the Mainland Scandinavian languages around 1900. Similarly, quantifiers such as Danish *mange* 'many' and *flere* 'several' could appear in Spec,QP above vP. However, corpus searches in Swedish historical materials in *Korp* (1,3 G) show that these examples were rare, probably not much more common than they are now.

There is however an interesting interaction between the expletive and negated pivots, discussed in Engels (2010). As shown in (48a), a negated IP-pivot is possible when the expletive is initial. If the initial position is not available, the expletive is normally realised after the finite verb in Swedish (see e.g. (6)), but this is sometimes not possible when there is a negated IP-pivot, as shown in (50a).¹⁷

- (50) a. Har (?*det) **ingen** varit här?
has EXPL nobody been here
- b. Har *(det) inte varit **någon** här?
has EXPL not been anybody here

As expected, the expletive is required in the case of a VP-pivot, (50b). In Icelandic, no expletive can appear, as expected.

- (51) a. Í dag hefur (*það) **enginn** verið hér.
in day has EXPL nobody been here
'Nobody has been here today.'

(1) *Það mun ekki hafa **neinn** verið hér.
EXPL *will not have anybody been here*

¹⁷Engels assumes, based on a detailed investigation of Faroese, that the expletive can appear in SpecAgrSP after a finite auxiliary. But if the expletive blocks the D-feature checking of the pivot subject by the finite verb, the result is ungrammatical. Sigurðsson (2010, 173) makes a similar proposal for the distribution of *það* in subordinate clauses: "*það* can act as an intervener between an operator and a variable, blocking a matching relation between the two".

- b. Í dag hefur (*það) ekki verið **neinn** hér.
in day has EXPL not been anybody here

A search for overt expletive in IP and a negated IP-pivot in *Korp* yielded a few examples. Almost all of these examples occur in older novels from around 1900 and involve the verb *finnas* ‘exist’.

- (52) Här talade dräng och husbonde och matmor och piga med
here spoke farm-hand and farmer and mistress and servant with
 varandra, som om det **ingen skillnad** fanns mellan dem.
each-other as if EXPL no difference existed between them
 (Lagerlöf: *Liljecronas hem*, 1911)

‘Here a farm hand and a farmer as well as a mistress and a servant spoke to each other as if there were no differences between them.’

The verb *finnas* looks like a passive although it no longer has the passive meaning ‘be found’. In general overt expletives and negated pivots work better if the verb is passive.

- (53) a. Om (?*det) **ingen** kommer, måste vi säga till.
if EXPL nobody comes must we say to
 ‘If nobody comes, we have to report it.’
 b. Om det **inget** görs åt saken, måste vi säga till.
if EXPL nothing do.PASS to thing.DEF must we say to
 ‘If nothing is done to this, we have to report it.’

If negated phrases occur in a special SpecNegP position, one might expect them to be able to co-occur with an IP-pivot, but, as Christensen (1991) and Engels (2010) note, this is not generally possible, see (54c), adapted from Christensen (1991, 156f.). There may, however, also be some interaction with focus; some speakers find (54d) better.

- (54) a. Jón hefur **engar bækur** keypt.
Jón has no books bought
 ‘Jón hasn’t bought any books.’
 b. Það hefur víst **einhver málvísindamaður** keypt bókina.
EXPL has they-say some linguist bought book.DEF
 ‘Some linguist has apparently bought the book.’
 c. *Það hefur víst **einhver málvísindamaður** engar bækur keypt.
EXPL has they-say some linguist no books bought

- d. ?Það hefur víst bara **einn málvísindamaður** enga bók keypt.
 EXPL *has they-say only one linguist no book bought*
 ‘Apparently only one linguist bought no book.’

More research is clearly needed on the information structure of presentational constructions and on the effects of focusing adverbs such as *only* and negation. It seems likely that the few examples with negated IP-pivots that we find in present-day Mainland Scandinavian languages are remnants from an earlier stage and have not led to the general option for IP-pivots which we find in Icelandic.

6 Transitive Expletive Constructions and Definiteness

In this section we take a closer look at the second main difference, viz. the purported absence of presentationals with transitive verbs in Swedish. Håkansson (2017) shows that some transitive expletive constructions have been possible in Swedish throughout history and that they are still used in many dialects. One common type involves a negated IP-pivot with a transitive verb, illustrated in (55a), originally from Wallin (1936, 368), or with a negated quantifier as pivot, as in (55b), originally from Ljunggren (1926, 351f.).

- (55) a. Det kan **ingen** göra den saken bättre än han.
 EXPL *can nobody do that thing.DEF better than he*
 ‘Nobody can do that better than him.’
 b. Det köper inte **många** sina kläder så billigt som hon.
 EXPL *buys not many their.REFL clothes as cheaply as she*
 ‘Not many people buy their clothes as cheaply as she does.’

The examples in (55) look like presentationals with indefinite pivots and corresponding examples in Icelandic are possible.

- (56) a. Það getur **enginn** gert þetta betur en hann.
 EXPL *gets nobody done this better than he*
 ‘Nobody can do that better than him.’
 b. Það kaupa ekki **marginir** jafnódýr föt og hún.
 EXPL *buy not many as-cheap clothes as she*
 ‘Not many people buy such cheap clothes as she does.’

The verbs *göra* ‘do, make’ and *köpa* ‘buy’ are agentive and should not appear in Swedish presentationals on Platzack’s account, where Agents and expletives are in complementary distribution in Spec,vP, see (38). Håkansson suggests that

Swedish also has the option of merging an expletive directly in Spec,CP, like Icelandic. This may be a motivated assumption although it then remains unclear how come this option is not used more generally. It seems plausible that the type of IP-pivot is relevant here. As we saw in Section 5, IP-pivots in Swedish tend to be negated or quantified.

Another common type in Håkansson's data is shown in (57), from the Nordic Dialect Corpus.

- (57) nej sa jag, det ska jag inte köpa någon bil. (NDC)
no said I EXPL shall I not buy any car
 'No, said I, I will definitely not buy a car.'

This type is characterized by having an initial *det* and a personal pronoun in IP. However, (57) is probably not a presentational construction since the highest DP is definite. This type is clearly ungrammatical in Icelandic, as shown in (58).

- (58) *Það ætla ég ekki að kaupa neinn bíl.
EXPL shall I not to buy any car

According to Sigurðsson (1989, 296), a pivot in Icelandic has to be “informationally ‘heavy’ or *nontopical*” by which he understands that it cannot be available in the context. Since anaphoric pronouns typically have referents which are available in the context, they are predicted to be unavailable as pivots. For Sigurðsson it is hence not the definiteness of the personal pronoun which excludes it as a pivot but rather the fact that it is not informationally heavy.¹⁸ Many of Håkansson's Swedish examples with personal pronouns in IP seem to have been used as exclamatives or protests against a suggested action. In this respect they clearly differ from presentational sentences which typically introduce an event, a situation or a new referent.

Presentational sentences with definite pivots can, however, be found in Icelandic, as shown in Rögnvaldsson (1984) and discussed in Sigurðsson (1989, 295f.), Thráinsson (2007) and Sigurðsson (2010).

- (59) a. Hvað kom fyrir?
what came for
 'What happened?'
 b. Það festist **rútan** á leiðinni norður.
EXPL got-stuck bus.DEF on way.DEF north
 'The bus got stuck on the way north.'

¹⁸Note, however, that putting contrastive stress on the pronoun does not improve the example.

(1) *Það hef **ÉG** ekki keypt bílinn.
EXPL have I not bought car.DEF

(59b) is only possible if it is common knowledge that only one bus runs that way and the bus hasn't been mentioned in the context. There are, however, more restrictions on presentationals with definite pivots. They are hardly used with transitive verbs and they are degraded with IP-pivots. More work is clearly required on the interaction between definiteness and pivothood in Icelandic.

In modern Swedish, examples like (59) are not possible, although they may have been possible in Old and Early Modern Swedish. Håkansson cites some examples with definites like *konungen* 'the king' and *thän timen* 'that time' Håkansson (2017, 276f.)). But there is at least one construction where a definite non-topical DP is possible as pivot, (60).¹⁹ A similar construction is available in Icelandic, (61).

- (60) Det hade kommit **den ena studenten efter den andra**.
 EXPL *had come the one.DEF student.DEF after the other.DEF*.
 'One student after another had come.'

- (61) Það hafði komið **hver stúdentinn** á fætur öðrum.
 EXPL *had come every student.DEF on feet others.DAT*
 'One student after another had come.'

Håkansson makes a lexical distinction between expletive topic *det*, which is never realized in post-finite position, and presentational *det*, which is required in post-finite position.²⁰ Sigurðsson (1989, 298) talks of lexicalization of a 'presentative' operator *það*. It seems clear that we need to distinguish different types of expletives in different constructions. We see this clearly in Icelandic, where *það* in clefts is obligatory also in post-finite position, unlike presentational *það*, as first noted in Thráinsson (1979).

- (62) a. Það var Chomsky sem skrifaði Syntactic Structures.
 EXPL *was Chomsky that wrote Syntactic Structures*
 'It was Chomsky who wrote Syntactic Structures'
 b. Var *(það) Chomsky sem skrifaði Syntactic Structures?
 was EXPL *Chomsky that wrote Syntactic Structures*

In Icelandic clefts, *það* is presumably merged in Spec,vP and then raised to Spec,IP and possibly Spec,CP, just like presentational and cleft *det* in Swedish.

¹⁹ (60) is modelled on Håkansson's authentic (51b).

²⁰ Yet another type of expletive is *det* used with extraposed object clauses. Håkansson (2018) shows that this expletive almost always appears initially, in Spec,CP, in modern Swedish.

7 Conclusions and further work

In this article we have carried out a comparison of presentational sentences in Icelandic and Swedish. By systematically distinguishing IP-pivots from VP-pivots, we have been able to establish that there are similar restrictions on roles and positions in both languages. VP-pivots have to be Themes and may co-occur with other DPs but only if the Theme pivot is the last DP argument in the vP. We speculate that this restriction may reflect the information structural function of presentational sentences, viz. to introduce a new, and often focussed, referent, but further investigations, including phonological ones, are required. As for IP-pivots, they are only generally available in Icelandic where they are the preferred option for Agents, Experiencers, Goals and Performers. One consequence of this is that we find presentational sentences in Icelandic which cannot be expressed as presentationals in Swedish. Negated IP-pivots are possible to some extent in Swedish. When they are used, the presentational expletive *det* is infelicitous after the finite verb. This suggests that we need to look further at the interaction between what Håkansson (2017) calls expletive topic *det* and the presentational expletive *det*.

In Section 4 we showed how the different word orders and thematic role assignments could be analysed given the argument structure proposed in Platzack (2010). There are, however, many aspects that we didn't consider and which require further research. For instance, we have said nothing about the mapping between thematic roles and case marking in Icelandic, see e.g. Zaenen et al. (1985), Maling (2001), Jónsson (2003), Jónsson (2005), Sigurðsson (2012a) and Sigurðsson (2012b).

In order to progress on this comparative path, we would need more comparable corpus data and more informant studies so that we can establish preference patterns, e.g. for IP-pivots and VP-pivots. In particular, we need to look more closely at the use conditions for IP-pivots in Icelandic. As shown in e.g. Vangsnes (2002, 46ff.) and Thráinsson (2007, 317ff.), some partitives and *all*-quantifiers are possible as IP-pivots but impossible as VP-pivots. Are these a new type of presentational constructions?

In a wider perspective we would of course like to address the questions when and why presentational sentences are used and whether there are any systematic differences between Icelandic and Swedish in this respect. This will involve looking more carefully at discourse structure and information structure, both of which are challenging.

Corpora

Korp <https://spraakbanken.gu.se/korp/>

Nordic Dialect Corpus <http://tekstlab.uio.no/nota/scandiasyn/>

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- Elisabet Engdahl, University of Gothenburg elisabet.engdahl@svenska.gu.se*
Joan Maling, Brandeis University maling@brandeis.edu
Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson, Lund University halldor_armann.sigurdsson@nordlund.lu.se
Annie Zaenen, CSLI, Stanford University [azaenen@stanford.edu](mailto:aзаenen@stanford.edu)