

The passive of reflexive verbs in Icelandic¹

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Abstract

The Reflexive Passive in Icelandic is reminiscent of the so-called New Passive (or New Impersonal) in that the oblique case of a passivized object NP is preserved. As is shown by recent surveys, however, speakers who accept the Reflexive Passive do not necessarily accept the New Passive, whereas conversely, speakers who accept the New Passive do also accept the Reflexive Passive. Based on these results we suggest that there is a hierarchy in the acceptance of passive sentences in Icelandic, termed the Passive Acceptability Hierarchy. The validity of this hierarchy is confirmed by our diachronic corpus study of open access digital library texts from Icelandic journals and newspapers dating from the 19th and 20th centuries (tímarit.is). Finally, we sketch an analysis of the Reflexive Passive, proposing that the different acceptability rates of the Reflexive and New Passives lie in the argument status of the object. Simplex reflexive pronouns are semantically dependent on the verbs which select them, and should therefore be analyzed as syntactic arguments only, and not as semantic arguments of these verbs.

1. Introduction

In Icelandic the simplex reflexive pronoun inflects for case (but not for number or gender) and exhibits distinctions between accusative (*sig*), dative (*sér*) and genitive (*sín*).² The example in (1) involves the reflexive verb *drífa sig* ‘hurry’, taking a simplex reflexive pronoun in the accusative.

- (1) Jón dreif **sig** á ball
Jón hurried REFL.ACC to dance
‘Jón hurried off to the dance’

A number of speakers of Icelandic accept reflexive verbs in a construction with passive morphology, as in (2), where the accusative of the reflexive pronoun is preserved. This construction, hereafter called the Reflexive Passive, is problematic because there is no (overt) antecedent so the anaphor does not seem to be bound.³

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² There is no nominative form of either the simplex (*sig*, *sér*, *sín*) or complex (*sjálfan sig*, *sjálfum sér*, *sjálfs sín* etc.) reflexive pronouns in Icelandic.

³ In this paper we generally translate the Reflexive Passive and the New Passive in Icelandic using the expletive *there* with *be* and an *-ing* form of the verb, even in examples taken from

- (2) Það var drifið **sig** á ball
 it was hurried REFL.ACC to dance
 ‘There was hurrying off to the dance’

The fact that the case-marking of the reflexive pronoun is preserved in the Reflexive Passive makes this construction similar to the New Passive (3a),⁴ which also preserves the accusative case of the NP corresponding to the object of the active, as in (3b).⁵

- (3) a. Það var skammað **mig**
 it was scolded me.ACC
 ‘There was scolding me’
- b. Mamma og pabbi skömmuðu **mig**
 mom and dad scolded me.ACC

Structural accusative case, on the other hand, is not preserved in the Canonical Passive in Icelandic, with nominative occurring instead.

- (4) **Ég** var skammaður
 I.NOM was scolded.NOM.SG.MASC

In the following we examine the Reflexive Passive in considerable detail, investigating both the types of verbs and the types of anaphors occurring in this construction, and focusing especially on the question of whether or not the reflexive pronoun is an argument. A further crucial issue involves the antecedent of the anaphor, which has been claimed by some to be syntactically present as a null subject (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002, 2010), whereas others (Eythórsson 2008, Jónsson 2009) argue against this view. A substantial part of the paper, however, is of a descriptive nature, reporting on the results from

outer sources (e.g. Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002). Although this practice may result in awkward or even unidiomatic English translations, we feel that it is justified since we wish to avoid prejudicing the interpretation of the relevant sentences. We have not in all cases managed to carry this practice out consistently. In the glosses, we do not mark the default form of the past participle; it is understood to be neuter singular, unless otherwise noted.

⁴ The New Passive is termed the New Impersonal by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002) and the New Construction by Eythórsson (2008) and Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2009), but we will keep the label New Passive here for convenience, even though the “passive” nature of this construction is debated. The same goes for the Reflexive Passive.

⁵ It is generally agreed that the postverbal NP is an object—not a subject—in the New Passive, as it passes standard tests for objecthood in Icelandic (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002, Eythórsson 2008, Jónsson 2009, Sigurðsson 2011).

recent surveys of contemporary Icelandic syntax, which included passive sentences of various types, and from a corpus-based investigation of electronically searchable Icelandic texts dating from about 1830 to the present.

The results from the surveys were of importance in establishing an implicational hierarchy in the acceptability of various passive constructions in Icelandic which we call the “Passive Acceptability Hierarchy”, as summarized in Table 1, but see section 3 for details.

Table 1. The Passive Acceptability Hierarchy

Impersonal Passive of intransitives > Reflexive Passive > New Passive

As observed already by H.Á. Sigurðsson (1989), and confirmed in subsequent surveys, the Reflexive Passive is more widespread than the New Passive: many speakers who do not accept the New Passive produce and accept sentences with the Reflexive Passive. On the other hand, the Reflexive Passive is not as widely accepted as the Impersonal Passive of intransitive verbs, including unergatives like *dansa* ‘dance’ (5a) and *horfa á* ‘watch, look at’ (5b), which takes a PP complement. The Impersonal Passive of verbs like *horfa á* is termed here the Prepositional Passive.

(5) a. Það **var dansað** á diskótekinu
 it was danced at disco.DEF
 ‘There was dancing at the disco’

b. Það **var horft** á hana í sundlauginni
 it was looked at her.ACC in swimming.pool.DEF
 ‘She was looked at in the swimming pool’

The corpus-based search shows, in terms of diachrony, that the Reflexive Passive is older than the New Passive. There are no unambiguous examples of either of these constructions in Old Icelandic (Eythórsson 2008). The oldest examples involving the Reflexive Passive occur in texts from the mid-19th century (to be exact, in a text from 1842; cf. section 4 below). The New Passive, on the other hand, is first attested in the mid-20th century (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002:129 report on an example uttered by an eight-year-old in 1959). In contrast, both the Canonical Passive of transitive verbs and the Impersonal Passive (including the Prepositional Passive) were ubiquitous already in Old Icelandic (Eythórsson 2008).

From a comparative perspective, it may be noted that the Reflexive Passive is not unique to Icelandic, but occurs, albeit to a limited extent, in other languages, for example German (Schäfer 2009, 2011), as in (6).

- (6) Hier **wurde sich** (von den Römern) **gewaschen**
 here was REFL (by the Romans) washed
 ‘Here there was washing (by the Romans)’

Áfarli (1992:128) provides the examples of Reflexive Passive in (7) for Norwegian, although such examples are not mentioned in standard descriptive grammars (cf. Faarlund et al. 1997 and Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2009 for discussion):

- (7) a. Det **vart rulla seg** i graset
 it was rolled REFL in grass.DEF
 ‘There was rolling in the grass’
- b. Det **blir bygd seg** hus
 it becomes built REFL house
 ‘There is building oneself a house’

According to Schäfer (2009, 2011), agentive *by*-phrases are possible in the Reflexive Passive in German, as indicated in (6). This is different from Icelandic where *by*-phrases are not generally accepted in the Reflexive Passive and the Impersonal Passive (see section 5.1). On the other hand, exact parallels to the Icelandic New Passive seem not to be found in German, and it is unclear if Norwegian has such a construction either (but see Eythórsson 2008 for a proposal in this respect).

In this paper we will proceed as follows: In section 2 we briefly discuss reflexive verbs and their occurrence in passives. Section 3 introduces the Passive Acceptability Hierarchy, based on our examination of passive-type sentences in contemporary Icelandic from recent surveys. Section 4 contains the results of a corpus-based search of reflexive passives in Icelandic journals, from the first half of the 19th century onwards. In section 5 we sketch an analysis of the Reflexive Passive, comparing it with the New Passive and discussing parallels in some other languages. Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. Types of reflexive verbs and their occurrence in passives

2.1 Types of reflexive verbs

Sigurjónsdóttir and Hyams (1992) divide reflexive verbs in Icelandic into two classes according to the nature of the anaphor they occur with: *raka* (‘shave’) verbs and *gefa* (‘give’) verbs. The first class takes the simplex anaphor *sig* and the second class takes the complex anaphor *sjálfan sig* (in which the first element, *sjálfur* ‘self’, inflects for case, number and gender like a strong adjective).⁶ Verbs of the *raka* class can occur with simplex reflexives and non-

⁶ A similar difference can be observed e.g. in Dutch, with the simplex reflexive pronoun *zich* and the complex reflexive pronoun *zichzelf* (cf. Sells, Zaenen and Zec 1987 and many others).

reflexive NPs, but some of these verbs can also occur with the complex anaphor in which case the anaphor is emphasized (as indicated by capital letters). Verbs of the *gefa* class, on the other hand, cannot occur with simplex reflexives. For details, see Thráinsson (1994:170, 2005:533 and 2007:461–504).

- (8) a. Jón **rakaði sig** / **SJÁLFAN SIG** / **Guðmund**
 Jón shaved REFL.ACC / self.ACC REFL.ACC / Guðmundur.ACC
 ‘Jón shaved / shaved HIMSELF / shaved Guðmundur’
- b. Jón **gaf ??sér** / **sjálfum sér** / **Siggu** **bók**
 Jón gave REFL.DAT / self.DAT REFL.DAT / Sigga.DAT book
 í jólagjöf
 in Christmas.present
 ‘Jón gave ??self / himself / Sigga a book as a Christmas present’

Sigurjónsdóttir and Hyams (1992:367) assume that verbs of the *raka* class have two lexical entries. On their analysis, the reflexive *raka sig* ‘shave oneself’ and the non-reflexive *raka einhvern* ‘shave someone’ are not considered to be the same verb.

As is well known, verbs of the *raka* type can be further divided into two subclasses: inherently reflexive verbs, e.g. *leika sér* ‘play’ (9), and naturally reflexive verbs, e.g. *baða sig* ‘bathe’ (10). The only object inherently reflexive verbs can take is the simplex reflexive:⁷

- (9) a. Börnin **leika sér** allan daginn
 children.DEF play REFL.DAT all day.DEF
 ‘The children are playing all day’
- b. *Ég **leik börnunum** allan daginn
 I play children.DAT.DEF all day.DEF

Naturally reflexive verbs, on the other hand, can either take a simplex reflexive (10a) or a non-reflexive NP object (10b):

⁷ A direct object other than a reflexive is possible with *leika*, but in such cases it takes accusative rather than dative case:

- (i) Andy Griffith leikur lögfræðinginn Matlock
 Andy Griffith plays lawyer.ACC.DEF Matlock
 ‘Andy Griffith plays the role of the lawyer Matlock’

(10) a. Börnin **böðuðu sig** á laugardögum
 children.DEF bathed REFL.ACC on Saturdays
 ‘The children bathed on Saturdays’

b. Mamman **baðaði börnin** á laugardögum
 mom.DEF bathed children.ACC.DEF on Saturdays

For many verbs, however, it is not particularly clear whether they are inherently reflexive or naturally reflexive. In a number of cases there is a semantic difference depending on whether the verb takes a reflexive or a regular object:

(11) a. Jón **skemmti sér** í gær
 Jón entertained REFL.DAT yesterday
 ‘Jón had fun yesterday’

b. Jón **skemmti öllum** í gær
 Jón entertained everyone.DAT yesterday
 ‘Jón entertained everyone yesterday’

In (11a), it is stated that Jón had fun, but this does not necessarily entail that he did anything special to entertain himself; it is actually more likely that someone else entertained him. The scenario for (11b), however, might be, for example, that Jón is an entertainer who was doing his job. This could mean that *skemmta* has two lexical entries, one with the reflexive and other without it, and so *skemmta sér* should be classified as an inherently reflexive verb since no other object is possible with that lexical entry.

It can be hard, however, to find the right criteria for deciding if a verb has two lexical entries. As described above, Sigurjónsdóttir and Hyams (1992:367) consider the verb *raka sig* to have a different lexical entry from *raka* (8a), even though the semantic difference is subtle. Sometimes the difference is not only semantic. For example, the verb *flýta* occurs with a reflexive pronoun in the meaning ‘hurry’. *Flýta* can also take a non-reflexive object, but only if the object is inanimate; in this case, however, the meaning is ‘schedule earlier (than planned)’:

(12) Jón **flýtti sér** / ***Katrínu** / **fyrirlestrinum**
 Jón hurried REFL.DAT / Katrín.DAT / lecture.DAT.DEF
 ‘Jón hurried / hurried *Katrín / scheduled the lecture earlier (than planned)’

In some cases, a verb can take a reflexive and a non-reflexive object, but with a different preposition (e.g., *um* vs. *tíl* in the following examples):

(13) a. Fjölskyldan **kom sér** / ***nágrönnnum sínum**
 family.DEF came REFL.DAT / neighbours.DAT OWN.REFL.DAT
 saman **um** að flytja
 together on to move
 ‘The family agreed to move / *made their neighbors agree to move’

b. Fjölskyldan **kom *sér** / **nágrönnnum sínum**
 family.DEF came REFL.DAT / neighbours.DAT OWN.REFL.DAT
til að flytja
 to to move
 ‘The family induced *itself / their neighbors to move’

Thus, the semantic difference between verbs taking reflexive and non-reflexive objects is sometimes very small and seemingly insignificant, but in other cases it is more likely that there are different lexical entries involved. For example, on the basis of the English translations of the sentences in (13) it is difficult to decide whether we are dealing with one lexical entry of the verb *koma*, with the basic meaning ‘induce’ (‘induce someone to agree on something’ and ‘induce someone to do something’), or two lexical entries; in the latter case we might consider *koma sér saman um* ‘agree on’ to be a different verb from other instances of *koma* and thus to be an inherently reflexive verb. Given the problematic nature of the classification of verbs in terms of reflexive and non-reflexive objects, we considered it necessary to touch upon the matter there. However, it would require a dedicated study to carry out a systematic analysis of the fine-grained semantic differences between these verbs, which is a task beyond the scope of the present paper.

2.2 Reflexive pronouns in passive

The classification of reflexives mentioned above is directly relevant to the topic of this paper because there seems to be a relationship between the type of reflexive pronoun and the ability of reflexive verbs to passivize. In an early discussion of the New Passive, H.Á. Sigurðsson (1989:355) states that it is “often heard in non-standard Icelandic.” In a footnote, H.Á. Sigurðsson adds that “sentences of this sort are much better if the verb is a reflexive one,” providing the following examples and judgments (H.Á. Sigurðsson 1989:355, fn. 60):

(14) a. ?Það **var leikið sér** allan daginn
 it was played REFL.DAT all day.DEF
 ‘There was playing all day’

- b. ??Það var baðað sig á laugardögum
 it was bathed REFL.ACC on Saturdays
 ‘There was bathing on Saturdays’

Although not expressly stated in this context, H.Á. Sigurðsson seems to be making a distinction between the passivization of an inherently reflexive verb (14a) and a naturally reflexive verb (14b), considering the former somewhat more felicitous than the latter.

The results of the survey conducted in 1999–2000 by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002) are in line with H.Á. Sigurðsson’s intuition, showing that the Reflexive Passive is accepted by a larger number of speakers than the New Passive. In their survey, Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir tested sentences involving various types of passive: the Canonical Passive, the Impersonal Passive, the Prepositional Passive, the New Passive and the Reflexive Passive. Their participants were mainly 15- and 16-year-old students, totaling 1,695 adolescents evaluated, with 200 adults also tested as a control group. The young speakers were divided into two groups, those from “Inner Reykjavík” and those living “Elsewhere” (i.e. in other areas in Reykjavík and in other locations in Iceland). The participants were given two choices: *yes* ‘this is something one can say’ and *no* ‘this is something one cannot say’ (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002). The results for the relevant sentences are reproduced next to the examples below, showing the percentage of those who accepted the test sentences. The figures in (15) show the acceptance rates of two New Passive sentences involving verbs taking accusative and dative indirect objects, respectively.⁸

(15) **New Passive: ACC vs. DAT indirect object and infinitival complement (MS67, MS48)**⁹

	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults
a. Það var beðið mig að vaska upp it was asked me.ACC to wash up ‘There was asking me to do the dishes’	74%	47%	8%

⁸ In Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir’s (2002) survey, accusative objects were accepted significantly less frequently than dative in the New Passive. The difference in the percentages between the sentences in (15a) and (15b) do not, however, reflect their results in this respect.

⁹ The examples in this section taken from Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002) are indicated by the abbreviation MS, followed by the relevant number in the Appendix to their paper; however, the translations of the sentences are ours, in accordance with our practice in this paper.

- | | | | | |
|----|--|-----|-----|----|
| b. | Það var sagt mér að taka til
it was said me.DAT to take to
‘There was telling me to clean up’ | 62% | 34% | 3% |
|----|--|-----|-----|----|

As seen in the examples in (15), the New Passive was accepted by the adolescents in “Inner Reykjavík” around half as frequently as by those living “Elsewhere”; the vast majority of the adults reject these sentences. In (16) we show the acceptance rate of two Reflexive Passive sentences with verbs taking an accusative simplex reflexive pronoun.¹⁰

(16) Reflexive Passive (MS6, MS27)

		Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults
a.	Svo var bara drifið sig á ball then was just hurried REFL.ACC on dance ‘Then there was hurrying off to the dance’	78%	67%	40%
b.	Það var haldið sig innan dyra it was kept REFL.ACC in doors út af óveðrinu due to bad.weather.DEF ‘There was staying indoors because of the bad weather’	82%	65%	37%

These examples show that passive sentences with simplex reflexive objects are judged more acceptable than those with non-reflexive objects, in particular by adults, but also by young speakers in Inner Reykjavík. However, the difference among speakers living “Elsewhere” is less clear, although a slightly higher percentage accept the Reflexive Passive than the New Passive. Moreover, adults were much more likely to accept a sentence with the accusative reflexive object *sig* than a sentence with a non-reflexive accusative object, which would unambiguously be an instance of the New Passive. (For a discussion of the significance of this fact in diachronic terms, see section 4 below.)

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002) did not test the complex reflexive in the passive, nor has it been tested in other surveys. However, a preliminary Google search indicates that such examples occur, although they seem to be rare. We consider such sentences to be instances of the New Passive, as we discuss in section 5.2 below.

¹⁰ It should be noted that the sentences in (15) and (16) are not minimal pairs, and this may affect the comparison.

(17) [...] það er drepið sjálfan sig
 it is killed self.ACC REFL.ACC
 ‘There is taking of one’s life’
<http://toxic-dream.blogcentral.is/blog/2006/7/14/mja/>

Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002) tested Prepositional Passive with both simplex and complex reflexive pronouns. Just as in the case of simplex reflexive pronouns, the adult participants were more willing to accept the Prepositional Passive of simplex reflexive pronouns than the New Passive:

(18) Prepositional Passive with a simplex reflexive pronoun (MS34)

	Else- Inner Adults
	where Rvík
Það var farið heim til sín	59% 56% 39%
it was gone home to REFL.GEN	
‘There was going home to oneself’	

It is not as clear how to interpret the results in (19) with a complex reflexive pronoun.

(19) Prepositional Passive with a complex reflexive pronoun (MS50, MS11)

	Else- Inner Adults
	where Rvík
a. Það var horft á sjálfan sig í speglinum	58% 48% 34%
it was looked at self.ACC REFL.ACC in mirror.DEF	
‘There was looking at oneself in the mirror’	
b. Það var bent á sjálfan sig á myndinni	19% 11% 13%
it was pointed at self.ACC REFL.ACC on picture.DEF	
‘There was pointing to oneself in the picture’	

For some reason, (19a) is accepted much more readily than (19b). Consider now the examples in (20). The sentence in (20a) contains an inherently reflexive verb in the Reflexive Passive taking prepositional complements, and the one in (20b) contains a naturally reflexive verb.

(20) a. Það er aldeilis slegið um sig núna
 it is totally hit about REFL.ACC now
 ‘There is really making a show of oneself now’
<http://annavaldis.blog.is/blog/annavaldis/entry/289875/>

- b. [...] eða getur þróast út í fíkn ef ekki er gáð að sér
 or can develop into addiction if not is checked at REFL.DAT
 ‘or can become an addiction if there is not taking care’
<http://www.kolbrun.ws/kaupgledi.htm>

In our judgment sentences such as these, with the simplex reflexive pronoun, are more acceptable than the ones in (19), with the complex reflexive pronoun, and are in fact just as acceptable as Reflexive Passives of the type given in (16). However, we will not discuss this matter further here, as a more detailed study of the acceptability of the use of simplex versus complex reflexive pronouns in the Prepositional Passive is needed.

In addition, Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002) tested the Prepositional Passive with a possessive reflexive pronoun as a part of the prepositional NP object. Note that the acceptance rate of (21) is similar to (18) and (19a) above (involving a Prepositional Passive with a simplex and complex reflexive pronoun), but much higher than (19b).

(21) Prepositional Passive with possessive reflexive pronoun (MS15)

	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults 36%
Það var haldið með sínu liði	63%	49%	36%
it was held with own.REFL.DAT team.DAT			
‘There was supporting one’s (own) team’			

Finally, Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002) tested some sentences with possessive reflexive pronouns occurring as part of object NPs (i.e. in the New Passive), including the ones in (22). Such sentences were much less readily accepted than the ones in (15), possibly for pragmatic reasons; see, however, the discussion in 5.2 below.

(22) Possessive reflexive pronoun as part of object NP (MS63, MS49)

	Else- where	Inner Rvík	Adults 2%
a. Á kvöldin var skoðað tölvupóstinn sinn	32%	10%	2%
in evenings.DEF was checked e-mail.ACC.DEF own.REFL.ACC			
‘In the evening there was checking one’s e-mail’			

- b. Í morgun **var hrint systur sinni** 13% 7% 2%
 in morning was pushed sister.DAT own.REFL.DAT
 af hjólinu
 off bike.DEF
 ‘This morning there was pushing one’s sister off her bike’

Besides the types of Reflexive Passive mentioned above, various other types have been observed recently, and some of them have been surveyed and discussed. This includes the Reflexive Passive of ditransitive verbs, in particular the Impersonal Ditransitive Reflexive Construction (IDRC) (cf. Eythórsson 2008). In this construction a simplex reflexive pronoun in the dative corresponds to the indirect object of the active, while the direct object NP remains in the accusative case.

- (23) Það **var fengið sér öllara**
 it was got REFL.DAT beer.ACC
 ‘There was having oneself a beer’

In the IDRC the verb can be inherently reflexive or naturally reflexive. Thus, the inherently reflexive verb *fá sér* (*eitthvað*) means ‘get oneself (something)’, but the non-reflexive *fá* (*einhverjum eitthvað*) has a different meaning, ‘hand (something) over (to someone)’. On the other hand, the naturally reflexive verb *redda* has the same meaning (‘fix’), with both a reflexive pronoun (*redda sér einhverju* ‘acquire oneself something’) and a non-reflexive pronoun/NP (*redda honum/manninum einhverju* ‘fix him/the man something’).

In a construction similar to the IDRC, the verb takes a PP complement containing a reflexive pronoun, rather than an indirect object, as well as a direct object NP:¹¹

- (24) a. Það **var hámað í sig sandköku og muffins** [...]

it was treated on refl.ACC sponge.cake.ACC and muffins.ACC

‘There was treating oneself to sponge cake and muffins [...]’

deisydyr.blogspot.com/2008_06_01_archive.html

- b. Það **var splæst á sig tveim bjórum** til

it was treated on REFL.ACC two.DAT beers.DAT more

‘There was treating oneself to two more beers’

<http://fosselsfolk.blogcentral.is/blog/2009/7/16/er-thetta-ekki-malid/>

Furthermore, it has been observed that resultative structures of the type *öskra sig hásan* ‘scream oneself hoarse’ (Whelpton 2011) can be passivized. A similar

¹¹ Thanks to Helgi Skúli Kjartansson, p.c., for pointing out to us examples such as (24b).

type of construction also occurs with a prepositional complement, e.g. *borða á sig gat* ‘eat a hole on oneself, eat so much that one explodes’; note that in this construction the PP containing the reflexive pronoun (*á sig*) must precede the NP (*gat* ‘hole’).

(25) a. Það **verður** klárlega **öskrað sig hásan** í sumar
 it will.be definitely screamed REFL.ACC hoarse.ACC in summer
 ‘There will definitely be screaming oneself hoarse this summer’
<http://www.myspace.com/vinirsagga1/comments>

b. Síðan **var borðað á sig gat**
 then was eaten on REFL.ACC hole.NOM/ACC
 ‘Then there was eating until one exploded’
<http://thorastefans.blogspot.com/2006/04/sleafer.html>

In this connection, the occurrence of reflexive pronouns which are complements of PPs modifying NPs with verbs of bodily care can also be mentioned; the PP containing the reflexive pronoun (*á sér*) also usually precedes the NP (*augabrúnirnar* ‘the eyebrows’, *hárið* ‘the hair’):

(26) a. Það **var plokkað á sér augabrúnirnar**
 it was plucked on REFL.DAT eyebrows.NOM/ACC.DEF
 ‘There was plucking one’s eyebrows’

b. [...] og þar **var krullað á sér hárið**
 and there was curled on REFL.DAT hair.NOM/ACC.DEF
 ‘and there, there was curling one’s hair’
<http://favitar-89.blogcentral.is/blog/2006/2/5/frabaert-afmaeli/>

In conclusion, several types of reflexive constructions have been observed, and it seems that all of them are also found in the passive, at least for some speakers. The Reflexive Passive can contain a simplex reflexive or a complex reflexive pronoun; it is formed with both monotransitive and ditransitive verbs, and with verbs taking PP complements (Prepositional Passive).¹² For convenience, we summarize the different types of ‘non-canonical’ passives that we have discussed in Table 2:

¹² The use of the terms “monotransitive” and “ditransitive” is justified because reflexive verbs in Icelandic govern the case of the reflexive pronoun. On the argument status of the latter, see section 5 below.

Table 2. Types of non-canonical passive in Icelandic

A. Impersonal Passive	Það var dansað ‘There was dancing’
Prepositional Passive	Það var horft á hana ‘She was looked at’
B. Reflexive Passive (simplex)	Það var drifið sig ‘There was hurrying off’
Prepositional Passive	Það var slegið um sig ‘There was making a show of oneself’
Reflexive Passive (complex)	Það var drepið sjálfan sig ‘There was taking of one’s life’
Prepositional Passive	Það var horft á sjálfan sig ‘There was looking at oneself’
Reflexive Pass. (possessives)	Það var skoðað tölvupóstinn sinn ‘There was checking one’s e-mail’
Prepositional Passive	Það var haldið með sínu liði ‘There was supporting one’s (own) team’
IDRC	Það var fengið sér öllara ‘There was having oneself a beer’
Prepositional Passive	Það var hámað í sig matinn ‘There was treating oneself to the food’
Passive of resultatives	Það var öskrað sig hásan ‘There was screaming oneself hoarse’
Prepositional Passive	Það var borðað á sig gat ‘There was eating until one exploded’
Pass. of verbs of bodily care	Það var plokkað á sér augabrunirnar ‘There was plucking one’s eyebrows’
C. New Passive	Það var barið mig ‘There was hitting me’

We now turn to a discussion of the acceptability of the Reflexive Passive, which seems to have an “intermediate” status between the Canonical Passive and the New Passive.

3. The Passive Acceptability Hierarchy

3.1 Comparison of different types of passive

In Icelandic, it has been observed that there is a hierarchy in the acceptability of different types of passive. This observation, initially made introspectively by individual linguists, has now become an established fact on the basis of results from recent surveys, that of Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002), conducted in 1999-2000, and the Variation in Syntax project (H. Thráinsson, PI), where three large-scale written questionnaires were administered in numerous locations in Iceland in 2005-07.

As to the different types of passive, we assume that all speakers of Icelandic accept the Impersonal Passive of intransitive verbs like *dansa* ‘dance’.

This was, in fact, established in Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir's 1999-2000 survey, as reported in Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2010).

(27) Impersonal Passive (MS51)

	Adolescents	Adults
Það var dansað í kringum jólatréð	97%	100%
it was danced in around Christmas.tree.DEF		
‘There was dancing around the Christmas tree’		

On the other hand, the New Passive is accepted only by some speakers of Icelandic, as shown in the aforementioned surveys. Therefore, it is clear that anyone who accepts any type of the New Passive also accepts the Impersonal Passive (including presumably the Prepositional Passive). It is also predicted that the Reflexive Passive has an intermediate position in terms of acceptability such that anyone who accepts the New Passive also accepts the Reflexive Passive, and anyone who accepts the Reflexive Passive also accepts the Impersonal Passive. In fact, in Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir's survey, many more adults accepted the Reflexive Passive of verbs taking simplex reflexive pronouns than the New Passive (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002:122). In order to capture this state of affairs we have proposed an implicational hierarchy, called the Passive Acceptability Hierarchy (Árnadóttir 2006, 2008, Eythórsson 2007, 2008):

Table 3. The Passive Acceptability Hierarchy

Impersonal Passive > Reflexive Passive > New Passive

The results from the Variation in Syntax project support this hierarchy; however, they show that the hierarchy is more fine-grained than indicated in Table 3, as discussed below.

Between 700 and 800 speakers participated in each of the three Variation in Syntax surveys. The participants were divided into four age groups: age 15, ages 20-25, ages 40-45 and ages 65-70. The Reflexive and the New Passive were tested in the first survey—all the sentences discussed below are from that survey, in which the answers from 772 speakers were evaluated. The speakers were given three choices: *yes* ‘I could say this’, ? ‘I could hardly say this’ and *no* ‘I could not say this’.

Let us first look at the acceptance rates for the sentences in (28), which constitute a near minimal pair; the direct object of *drífa sig* ‘hurry’ in (28a) is a reflexive pronoun but with the verb *skamma* ‘scold’ in (28b) it is a non-reflexive

pronoun. In the following examples the judgments of the speakers are indicated by the figures below the relevant choices:¹³

(28) Reflexive Passive vs. New Passive (T1008, T1055)

			yes	?	no	total
a.	Svo var drifið sig á ball	%	46	15	39	
	then was hurried REFL.ACC on dance	N	355	115	298	768
	‘Then there was hurrying off to the dance’					
b.	Það var skammað mig fyrir letina	%	14	10	76	
	it was scolded me.ACC for laziness.DEF	N	107	78	584	769
	‘There was scolding me for being lazy’					

Most of those who accepted sentence (28b) also accepted (28a) but not vice versa. To be exact, out of the 107 participants who accepted (28b), 85, i.e. 79%, also found (28a) to be grammatical. This is in accordance with the results from Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002).

In connection with this, it is interesting to look at the speakers who did not rate the sentences in (28) equally, i.e. those speakers who did not judge both of them either as acceptable, questionable or unacceptable. The speakers fall into three groups according to how they judged these two sentences, as shown in Figure 1: (i) those who found the sentences equally good; (ii) those who found the New Passive sentence better than the Reflexive Passive sentence; and (iii) those who found the Reflexive Passive more acceptable than the New Passive.

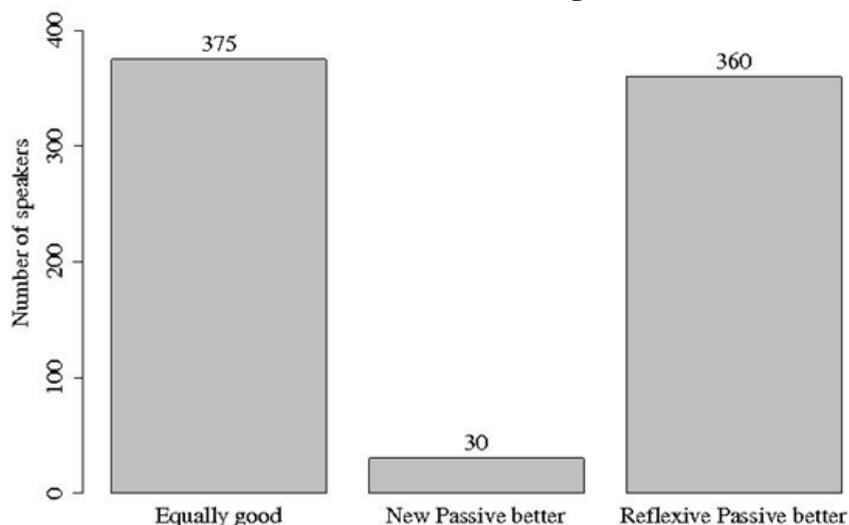


Figure 1. Comparison of the New Passive and the Reflexive Passive

¹³ The examples from the Variation in Syntax survey are indicated by the abbreviation T (for *Tilbrigðakönnun* ‘Variation study’), followed by the relevant survey and question numbers. Example (28a) is the only example of the Reflexive Passive tested in the Variation in Syntax survey. It would be interesting to investigate this matter in detail, but that is a task for the future.

Looking only at speakers who did not judge the two sentences equally, it is evident that the Reflexive Passive sentence usually had a higher score: 360 speakers found it more acceptable than the New Passive, whereas only 30 judged the New Passive more acceptable than the Reflexive Passive.

Next, we wish to establish if the difference in acceptability between the New Passive of monotransitive verbs and the Reflexive Passive is statistically significant. For this we use chi square test, performed using the statistics program R based on the data stored in SPSS, and use the 95% confidence interval, which means that if the p-value is less than .05 (5%) the difference is significant. Since more sentences of the New Passive type in (28b) were tested in the questionnaire, we randomly selected a few of them, as shown in (29):

(29) New Passive of monotransitives (T1005, T1006, T1014, T1024)

			yes	?	no	total
a.	Það var rekið manninn út af staðnum it was fired man.ACC.DEF out of place.DEF 'There was throwing the man out of the place'	%	18	10	72	
		N	138	77	552	767
b.	Það var strax dæmt vítaskyrtu it was immediately judged penalty.kick.ACC 'There was immediately awarding a penalty kick'	%	34	12	54	
		N	260	94	415	769
c.	Þess vegna var skammað formanninn á fundinum that's why was scolded chairman.ACC.DEF on meeting.DEF 'That's why there was scolding the chairman at the meeting'	%	21	9	70	
		N	159	72	537	768
d.	Var passað krakkana á meðan? was babysitted kids.ACC.DEF meanwhile 'Was there babysitting the kids in the meantime?'	%	13	11	76	
		N	101	81	587	769

In total then, we now have five sentences for a variable we term the “New Passive of monotransitives”. In the chi square test we skip the option ? ‘I could hardly say this’; the interpretation of a 3-by-2 table would be more complicated. We therefore use 2-by-2 tables. In Table 4 we show the total frequencies and ratios of *yes* and *no* responses to the sentences in (28b) and (29) (the New Passive of monotransitives) compared to the same for (28a) (the Reflexive Passive).

Table 4. Observed frequencies	yes	no	total
New Passive of monotransitives	765 (22%)	2675 (78%)	3440 (100%)
Reflexive Passive	355 (54%)	298 (46%)	653 (100%)
total	1120	2973	

These are the *observed* frequencies. The *expected* frequencies, assuming that the two distributions do not differ significantly, are shown in the following table:

Table 5. Expected frequencies	yes	no	total
New Passive of monotransitives	941 (27%)	2499 (73%)	3440 (100%)
Reflexive Passive	179 (27%)	474 (73%)	653 (100%)
total	1120	2973	

We now want to find out if the difference between observed and expected frequencies is significant. We start out with the null hypothesis that the difference is not significant, and then consider the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant difference. It turns out that in the case of the frequencies in Table 4 and Table 5, the difference between them is in fact significant.¹⁴ We thus reject the null hypothesis, and accept the alternative hypothesis that the Reflexive Passive is statistically significantly more acceptable than the New Passive in Icelandic.

Now compare the Reflexive Passive of *drífa sig* in (28a) above with the Impersonal Ditransitive Reflexive Construction (IDRC), tested with the three sentences illustrated in (30):

(30) IDRC (T1088, T1048, T1120)

		yes	?	no	total
a.	Það var auðvitað fengið sér it was of course got REFL.DAT	% 39	14	48	
	hamborgara hamburger.ACC	N 297	105	368	770
	‘There was, of course, having oneself a hamburger’				
b.	Þá var bara keypt sér then was just bought REFL.DAT	% 24	13	64	
	nýjan bíl new.ACC car.ACC	N 181	98	489	768
	‘Then there was just buying oneself a new car’				

¹⁴ $\chi^2 = 284.98$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$.

c.	Það var venjulega valið sér	%	17	13	70	
	it was usually picked REFL.DAT	N	130	101	533	764
	kjötréttinn					
	meat.dish.ACC.DEF					
	‘There was usually choosing oneself the meat dish’					

All of these IDRC sentences were judged more negatively than the Reflexive Passive in (28a). This is expected since—in addition to taking a simplex reflexive pronoun as an indirect dative object—the main verb in the IDRC assigns accusative case to the direct object, as in the New Passive. Thus, the Reflexive Passive is more readily accepted than the IDRC—the difference between the IDRC and the Reflexive Passive, using the chi square test, is highly significant.¹⁵ There is quite a large numerical difference between the most accepted IDRC sentence, (30a), and the least accepted one, (30c). Nevertheless, the difference between even (30a) and the Reflexive Passive in (28a) is significant.¹⁶

The IDRC sentences in (30) were all accepted more frequently than the New Passive in (28b) above. We now compare the IDRC sentences not only to (28b) but also the New Passive in (29). The observed frequencies are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Observed frequencies	yes	no	total
New Passive of monotransitives	765 (22%)	2675 (78%)	3440 (100%)
IDRC	608 (30%)	1390 (70%)	1998 (100%)
total	1373	4065	

The IDRC sentences are accepted significantly more frequently than the New Passive sentences.¹⁷ It is not clear to us why this is since the direct object is assigned accusative both in the IDRC and in the New Passive and we see no other obvious syntactic difference between the two constructions.

The sentences in (28a) vs. (28b) form a near minimal pair, and the ones in (30) vs. (31) do so, as well. The indirect objects in (30) are reflexive pronouns, but in (31) it is a non-reflexive pronoun; in each of these examples there is a full NP direct object in the accusative case.

¹⁵ $\chi^2 = 121.89$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$.

¹⁶ $\chi^2 = 12.41$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$.

¹⁷ $\chi^2 = 44.94$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$.

(31) New Passive of a ditransitive (T1052)

				yes	?	no	total
Það var sýnt þeim bæklinga	%	18	10	72			
it was shown them.DAT brochures.ACC	N	135	80	550	765		
áður en þau fóru							
before they left							
‘There was showing them brochures before they left’							

Although the IDRC sentence in (30c) and the New Passive sentence in (31) have similar rates of acceptance, this difference is insignificant¹⁸, and there is a clear difference between the other two IDRC sentences, (30a-b), and the sentence in (31). When taken together, the difference is significant between the three IDRC sentences and the sentence which contains the New Passive of a ditransitive verb.¹⁹ We conclude that the IDRC—which is subordinate to the Reflexive Passive in the Passive Acceptability Hierarchy—is superior in acceptability to both the New Passive of monotonatives and that of ditransitives.

Now compare the New Passive of ditransitives to the New Passive of monotonatives in (28b) and (29). The correlation between the sentence in (31) on the one hand, and (28b) and (29), on the other hand, is high ($r = 0.737$, using Pearson’s correlation test performed in R). The difference between those two types, using chi square test, is not statistically significant.²⁰ These results further strengthen the argument that the New Passive (from monotonatives and ditransitives alike) be placed at the bottom end of the Passive Acceptability Hierarchy.

On the basis of the findings in this section, we conclude that, for the Passive Acceptability Hierarchy, the IDRC is in general more widely accepted than the New Passive of monotonatives and ditransitives, but less so than the Reflexive Passive of monotonatives.

3.2 Variation by age

Using statistical methods such as the chi square test involves making assumptions about the population, drawn from our sample (speakers in the questionnaire). Such assumptions can be made when the sample is representative of the population, e.g. with regard to age, education and sex. As mentioned above, participants in the Variation in Syntax surveys were divided into four age groups. The age distribution in the first survey is shown in Table 7.

¹⁸ $\chi^2 = .00$, $df = 1$, $p = .963$.

¹⁹ $\chi^2 = 29.29$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$.

²⁰ $\chi^2 = 2.14$, $df = 1$, $p = .143$.

Table 7. Age distribution in Variation in Syntax, survey I

15-year-olds	20-25	40-45	65-70
205 (27%)	198 (26%)	192 (25%)	177 (23%)

This age distribution is not strictly representative of the Icelandic population, since only four age groups are used that do not cover every age; on the other hand, these groups are broadly representative of the Icelandic population, for example, the median age of Icelanders is 35.6 according to *indexmundi.com*, which corresponds to the age groups used in the survey. Thus we assume that our findings will be broadly representative, at least concerning older versus younger speakers. In this subsection we only discuss the results regarding the social variable age; we leave the important study of the impact of other social variables on the acceptability of passives to later work.

As is evident from Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir's (2002) survey, the New Passive and the Reflexive Passive are more readily accepted by younger speakers than by older speakers. Nevertheless, there is a clear distinction between these two passive types in that a higher percentage of adults accept the Reflexive Passive than the New Passive. Moreover, in every age group many more speakers accept the Reflexive Passive, as in (32a), than the New Passive of monotransitives, as in (32b).²¹

(32) Reflexive Passive vs. New Passive (T1008, T1055)

					15 yrs	20-25	40-45	65-70
a.	Svo var drifið sig	á ball	%	70/17	63/18	30/52	17/73	
	then was hurried	REFL.ACC on dance	N	142/35	125/36	58/99	30/128	
b.	Það var skammað mig	fyrir	%	40/41	9/77	3/93	2/96	
	it was scolded	me.ACC for	N	81/84	17/153	6/179	3/168	
	letina							
	laziness.DEF							

The same is true for the comparison of the Reflexive Passive, cf. (32b), and the New Passive of ditransitives, cf. (33). In every age group, fewer speakers accept the New Passive.

²¹ Where results are shown divided by age groups, we show the total of *yes* and *no* responses separated by a slash /. Note that the percentages shown in these tables take into account ? responses and this explains why the numbers do not add up to 100%. The ? responses are however, as before, not used in the chi square test.

(33) New Passive of a ditransitive (T1052)

		15 yrs	20-25	40-45	65-70
Það var sýnt þeim	%	43/40	21/66	2/91	2/95
it was shown them.DAT	N	87/80	42/129	3/174	3/167
bæklinga áður en þau fóru					
brochures.ACC before they left					

Note that only 9% of participants in the age group of 20-25-year-olds accepted the New Passive of monotransitives, cf. (32b), but 21% accepted the New Passive of a ditransitive, cf. (33). The difference in this age group with respect to those two sentences is statistically significant.²² We do not have an explanation for this at this point.

Now compare the results for the Reflexive Passive in (32a) to the results for the IDRC, shown in (34).

(34) IDRC (T1088, T1048, T1120)

		15 yrs	20-25	40-45	65-70
a. Það var auðvitað fengið sér	%	67/19	55/30	19/67	9/81
it was of course got REFL.DAT	N	138/39	108/59	36/129	15/141
hamborgara					
hamburger.ACC					
b. Þá var bara keypt sér	%	49/32	31/51	7/83	4/93
then was just bought REFL.DAT	N	100/66	61/101	13/160	7/162
nýjan bíl					
new.ACC car.ACC					
c. Það var venjulega valið sér	%	39/40	16/68	5/87	5/89
it was usually picked REFL.DAT	N	80/81	32/134	9/165	9/153
kjötréttinn					
meat.dish.ACC.DEF					

It turns out that a higher percentage accept the Reflexive Passive in (32a) than all three IDRC sentences in (34) in every age group. For the three oldest age groups, 20-25-year-olds, 40-45-year-olds and 65-70-year-olds, the difference between the Reflexive Passive in (32a) and the most accepted IDRC sentence, (34a), is significant.²³ This is, however, far from being significant for 15-year-olds,²⁴ although the difference is significant in this age group between the

²² 20-25-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 12.63$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$.

²³ 20-25-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 6.70$, $df = 1$, $p = .010$; 40-45-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 8.90$, $df = 1$, $p = .003$; 65-70-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 5.62$, $df = 1$, $p = .018$.

²⁴ 15-year-olds: $\chi^2 = .27$, $df = 1$, $p = .601$.

Reflexive Passive and (34b),²⁵ on the one hand, and (34c),²⁶ on the other. We thus conclude that the Passive Acceptability Hierarchy holds within each age group for the Reflexive Passive as against other passive types.

Now compare the IDRC to the New Passive of monotransitives. It is only in the age group of 20-25-year-olds that the difference between (34c), the least accepted IDRC sentence, and (32b) is statistically significant.²⁷ For 15-year-olds, the difference is far from being significant and it is also insignificant in the two oldest groups.²⁸ When the most accepted IDRC sentence, (34a), is compared to the New Passive of monotransitives, (32b), it emerges that the difference is statistically significant for every age group, i.e., the IDRC is significantly more accepted than the New Passive.²⁹

We have already concluded that, in all age groups, the Reflexive Passive is superior in the Passive Acceptability Hierarchy to both the IDRC and the New Passive of monotransitives. The internal ordering of the IDRC and the New Passive remains to be decided for every age group. We have seen that in some examples the difference is insignificant, whereas in others the IDRC is accepted significantly more frequently than the New Passive. In other words, we have not seen any significant difference “in favor” of the New Passive over the IDRC. This may be taken to suggest that the IDRC is superior to the New Passive in the hierarchy. However, we wish to make one final comparison—this time between the three IDRC sentences and the five sentences that contain the New Passive of monotransitives, i.e., (32b) and (35). Note sentence (35b), in which the acceptance rate in the oldest group is surprisingly—almost suspiciously—high. We can only speculate why this is so; the reason may have to do with the form of the past participle (*dæmt*) or the fact that the object NP (*vítaspyrnu*) is indefinite, or both.³⁰

²⁵ 15-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 16.47$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$.

²⁶ 15-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 34.88$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$.

²⁷ 20-25-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 5.80$, $df = 1$, $p = .016$.

²⁸ 15-year-olds: $\chi^2 = .01$, $df = 1$, $p = .914$; 40-45-year-olds: $\chi^2 = .83$, $df = 1$, $p = .361$; 65-70-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 3.46$, $df = 1$, $p = .063$.

²⁹ 15-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 30.92$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$; 20-25-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 107.91$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$; 40-45-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 28.50$, $df = 1$, $p = .000$; 65-70-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 9.69$, $df = 1$, $p = .002$.

³⁰ The non-agreeing form of the participle *dæmt* ‘judged’ in (35b) is minimally different from the form *dæmd* in the Canonical Passive, which agrees with the nominative *vítaspyrna* ‘penalty’.

(35) **New Passive of monotransitives (T1005, T1006, T1014, T1024)**

		15 yrs	20-25	40-45	65-70
a.	Það var rekið manninn	% 47/33	16/73	4/92	2/95
	it was fired man.ACC.DEF	N 95/67	32/143	7/176	4/166
	út af staðnum				
	out of place.DEF				
b.	Það var strax dæmt	% 61/21	35/52	14/78	23/67
	it was immediately judged	N 125/44	68/103	26/150	41/118
	vítaspyrnu				
	penalty.kick.ACC				
c.	Þess vegna var skammað	% 54/30	20/68	4/91	2/95
	that's why was scolded	N 110/60	39/133	7/175	3/169
	formanninn á fundinum				
	chairman.ACC.DEF on meeting.DEF				
d.	Var passað krakkana	% 37/41	11/78	1/93	1/96
	was babysitted kids.ACC.DEF	N 75/84	21/154	2/179	3/170
	á meðan?				
	meanwhile				

The observed frequencies, i.e. the sum of *yes* and *no* answers, which are needed for the chi square test, are shown in Table 8. Note that the percentages for ? responses are omitted.

Table 8. Observed frequencies		15 yrs		20-25		40-45		65-70	
		yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no
New Passive of monotransitives	%	59	41	21	79	5	95	6	94
	N	486	339	177	686	48	859	54	791
IDRC	%	63	37	41	59	11	89	6	94
	N	318	186	201	294	58	454	31	456

In two of the four age groups, namely 20-to-25-year-olds and 40-to-45-year-olds, the relative frequency of acceptance is higher for the IDRC than the New Passive. Furthermore, the difference between the two passive types is significant in these groups.³¹ In the youngest and the oldest group however, the difference is insignificant (in fact, the relative frequency is the same (6%) for these two types in the oldest group).³²

³¹ 20-25-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 63.25$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$; 40-45-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 17.25$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$.

³² 15-year-olds: $\chi^2 = 2.29$, $df = 1$, $p = .130$; 65-70-year-olds: $\chi^2 = .00$, $df = 1$, $p = .986$.

Our conclusion is that where one passive type is preferred to the other, the IDRC is considered better than the New Passive. This applies to two age groups. In the oldest group, however, speakers do not in general like either the IDRC or the New Passive, and therefore one of these constructions is not preferred over the other. Conversely, more speakers in the youngest age group find the two types in question acceptable than reject them, and as previously mentioned, the difference between these types is insignificant in this age group. Assuming for the sake of argument that the New Passive gains more and more ground and, at some point in the future, becomes accepted and used by the entire Icelandic-speaking population, this would mean that the Passive Acceptability Hierarchy would cease to apply.

3.3 The hierarchy

The above results support the proposal that there is a hierarchy of different types of passive in Icelandic, the Passive Acceptability Hierarchy (cf. Árnadóttir 2006, 2008, and Eythórsson 2007).

Table 9. The Passive Acceptability Hierarchy (more fine-grained)

DO=direct object, IO=indirect object

I) V-intrans.	Það var dansað 'There was dancing'	Impersonal Passive
II) V+reflexive	Það var drifið sig á ball 'There was hurrying off to the dance'	Inherent refl. and naturally refl. verbs
III) V+refl.+DO	Það var auðvitað fengið sér hamborgara 'There was, of course, having oneself a Refl. Construction hamburger'	Impersonal Ditrans. Refl. Construction
IV) V+DO	Það var skammað mig fyrir letina 'There was scolding me for being lazy'	New Passive of monotransitives
V+IO+DO	Það var sýnt þeim bæklinga áður en þau fóru 'There was showing them brochures before they left'	New Passive of ditransitives

Given the findings of our recent research, it is clear that the picture is more complicated than even that shown in Table 9, and that a more fine-grained version of the hierarchy can be given. However, for our present purposes this representation of the Passive Acceptability Hierarchy will suffice.

Before proposing an analysis of the status of the different passive types reflected by the hierarchy, we wish to consider the question of diachrony. Eythórsson (2007) introduced the first version of the Passive Acceptability Hierarchy, suggesting that it reflected different diachronic stages in the emergence of different passive types. We know that the Impersonal Passive is much older than the New Passive, which is a fairly recent phenomenon in

Icelandic. It remains to determine the age of the Reflexive Passive, which is what we propose to do in the next section.

4. The diachrony of the Reflexive Passive

4.1 The investigation

In this section we give an overview of examples of reflexives in passive constructions found in electronically searchable Icelandic texts. These examples were collected from *tímarit.is* (<http://timarit.is>), an open access digital library which at the time of the study in September 2010 contained more than three million pages of scanned newspapers and periodicals, the oldest one from 1697. It should be noted that the computer correctly “reads” the font of the newspapers only from around 1830, so an automatic word search is impossible for the older newspapers. We want to emphasize that this method only gives us clues regarding the development. We cannot, e.g., compare the relative frequencies of different passive types over time.

We made a list of 650 reflexive verbs, using Jóhannsdóttir’s (1996) extensive verb list.³³ The majority of the verbs on the list are monotonatives, but it also includes ditransitives and verbs where the reflexive pronoun is a complement of a PP. The list does not include verbs taking complex reflexive pronouns or possessive reflexive pronouns, because such verbs are more complicated to search for than the ones taking simplex reflexive pronouns.

On the basis of this list, we searched for occurrences of the verbs in passive constructions, using the search string “**var + past participle + sig/sér/sjer/sín**” (e.g. “*var baðað sig*” ‘was bathed REFL.ACC’). In other words, we searched for a combination of the auxiliary *vera* ‘be’ in the past tense indicative, the past participle of the main verb and the reflexive pronoun in the appropriate case (including an archaic dative spelling variant *sjer*). In this way, 42 verbs were found in the Reflexive Passive. The search conveniently excludes almost all non-passive examples, and this made it possible to search for all of the 650 verbs relatively quickly.³⁴ However, the search also excludes many passive examples, e.g. cases in which the auxiliary is in a different tense or mood (e.g. the present indicative in *er baðað sig* ‘is bathed REFL.ACC’), or in which an adverb intervenes between the auxiliary and the past participle (e.g. *var oft baðað sig* ‘was often bathed REFL.ACC’).

In order to find more examples of each verb, we used a broader search string “**past participle + sig/sér/sjer/sín**” (e.g. “*baðað sig*” ‘bathed REFL.ACC’). Since this search was very time-consuming, we limited the search to the 42

³³ The list is very extensive and includes verbs that are probably very rare as reflexives.

³⁴ Non-passive examples found using this search string are rare. Most of them are instances where *sér* is not the reflexive pronoun but an adverb meaning ‘especially, separately’.

verbs we had already found in the Reflexive Passive. This search provided us with many of the oldest examples (see 4.2.1).

In the Appendix we give a list consisting of the oldest example of each verb, but when there is more than one example of a single verb pre-dating 1910, we include all of them.

4.2 Results

4.2.1 The oldest examples

The oldest example of the Reflexive Passive we found in the corpus is of the verb *flýta sér* ('hurry') in 1842.

- (36) Þókti og mönnum sem mjög **væri flýtt sér** með að byggja
thought also men that very was hurried REFL.DAT with to build
þau [...] them
'People also thought that there was a lot of hurrying to build them'
Skírnir 16, 1 January 1842, p. 51

The next example occurs in a text from 1850, involving *skipta sér af* 'interfere with'.

- (37) [...] og ekki **var skipt sjer af** að vatna því [...]
and not was interfered REFL.DAT of to water it
'and there was no interfering with watering them [i.e. the sheep]'
Lanztíðindi 11–12, 28 February 1850, p. 43

We found twenty examples of the Reflexive Passive from the 19th century, formed with nine verbs: *flýta sér* 'hurry', *skipta sér af* 'interfere with', *snúa sér* 'turn (to)', *furða sig á* 'wonder (at)', *skemmta sér* 'have fun', *koma sér saman um* 'agree on', *hvíla sig* 'rest', *reiða sig á* 'rely on', and *leika sér* 'play'. Of the twenty examples there are six occurrences of the verb *skipta sér af*. The verb *skemmta sér* 'have fun' is also quite common in the Reflexive Passive, the first example occurring in 1891.

- (38) Á undan og eptir leiknum, **var skemmt sjer** með dansi.
on before and after game.DEF was entertained REFL.DAT with dance
'Before and after the game, there was having fun dancing'
Heimskringla 17, 22 April 1891, p. 1

In fact, during the period 1891 to 1910, the verb *skemmta sér* is found in fourteen of the 38 examples of the Reflexive Passive.

These oldest examples occur in various journals and newspapers, some of which, like *Skírnir*, are written in a sophisticated literary style, but a few

examples come from *Lögberg* and *Heimskringla*, published by Icelandic immigrants in Canada. It is noteworthy that thirteen out of the 38 examples occurring before 1910 appeared in a single news journal, *Þjóðólfur*, and it is possible that some of them stem from one and the same writer.³⁵

4.2.2 A note on the case of the reflexive pronoun

The examples from *timarit.is* seem to show a high preference for a dative reflexive over an accusative reflexive pronoun in the Reflexive Passive. We found 23 dative verbs occurring in 174 examples, but 19 accusative verbs occurring in only 40 examples. This result is all the more interesting in light of the fact that we searched for many more verbs taking reflexive pronouns in the accusative (402 verbs) than in the dative (240 verbs). It must be noted that this preference for dative is not limited to the Reflexive Passive; according to *Íslensk orðtíðnibók* (Icelandic Frequency Dictionary: Pind, Magnússon and Briem 1991:397) the dative reflexive pronoun has in general a much higher token frequency than the accusative reflexive pronoun (accusative *sig* 1217 tokens, dative *sér* 2122 tokens).

No examples of the Reflexive Passive with a genitive reflexive were found on *timarit.is*. This is not surprising, given the fact that verbs assigning genitive are relatively few in number. When searching for examples of the Reflexive Passive, there were only thirteen verbs taking a genitive reflexive pronoun on our list, and some of these are highly infrequent, e.g. *hefna* ‘take revenge’ in (39). We do not think that there is any reason to assume that the genitive reflexive pronoun is less acceptable in the passive than any other case form of the reflexive pronoun, as examples found on the Internet indicate, including the following:³⁶

- (39) [...] þegar bróðir minn hafi verið eikkað leiðinlegur við eikkerja
 when brother my had been something mean to Some
 krakka og þa var hefnt sín á mér!
 kids and then was revenged REFL.GEN on Me
 ‘when my brother had been a bit mean to some kids and then there was
 revenging on me!’
www.hugi.is/linux/articles.php?page=byuseranduser=sadisanna1

³⁵Seven of these oldest examples come from *Austri*, published in the East of Iceland, which might tempt us to draw some conclusions about regional variation, but further evidence would be needed to establish this conclusively.

³⁶ It may be added that the reflexive pronoun is, according to the Icelandic Frequency Dictionary, much lower in token frequency (94) in the genitive case than in accusative (1217) or dative (2122) (Pind, Magnússon and Briem 1991:397).

4.2.3 Different types of Reflexive Passive

All of the verbs searched for on *timarit.is* take a simplex reflexive pronoun.³⁷ Examples of the passive of *hneigja sig* ‘bow’ and *leika sér* ‘play’ are shown in (40).

- (40) a. En þá **var hneigt sig** og brosað og beðist afsökunnar.
but then was bowed REFL.ACC and smiled and asked forgiveness
‘But then was bowing and smiling and apologizing’
Morgunblaðið, 6 September 1946, p. 15
- b. Um kveldið, [...] **var dansað og leikið sér** dálítið [...]
in evening.DEF was danced and played REFL.DAT a little
‘In the evening, there was dancing and playing a little’
Fjallkonan 38, 20 September 1894, p. 151

In addition to taking the simplex reflexive pronoun, many of the verbs occur with a prepositional phrase, e.g. *furða sig á* ‘be surprised at’ and *halla sér að* ‘lean on’.

- (41) a. Í grein þessari **er furðað sig** á þessari ályktun [...]
in article this is surprised REFL.ACC on this conclusion
‘In this article there is surprising at this conclusion’
Þjóðólfur 3–4, 20 January 1888, p. 9
- b. En nú mun **verða hallað sér** að tilboði Siemens og
but now will will.be leaned REFL.DAT to offer S. and
Schuckert [...]
S.
‘But now there will be leaning towards the offer of Siemens and Schuckert’
Austri 19, 13 May 1912, p. 65

We only searched for about 30 verbs with a reflexive pronoun in a prepositional phrase. Although this search needs to be extended to give a more complete picture of the situation, we nevertheless found five verbs with the reflexive pronoun in a prepositional phrase, including *hreiðra um sig* ‘settle down comfortably’ (1936) and *ugga að sér* ‘be on one’s guard’ (1960):

³⁷ We did not search thoroughly on *timarit.is* for naturally disjoint reflexives (that is, *gefa* verbs, as opposed to inherently and naturally reflexive verbs), since all transitive verbs fall into this class (excluding inherently and naturally reflexive verbs, which we do not consider transitive, as argued in section 5). We only searched for a few verbs like *gefa* ‘give’, *sannfæra* ‘convince’ and *senda* ‘send’ with the complex reflexive, without finding any passive examples. So we cannot draw any conclusions about *gefa* verbs from our corpus search.

- (42) a. [...] en því næst **hreiðrað um sig** af nýju í flatsænginni.
 but it next nestled around REFL.ACC of new in pallet. DEF
 ‘but then there was again nestling on the pallet’
Vísir 90, 31 March 1936, p. 2
- b. [...] svo æskan skilji að alvara er á ferðum ef
 so young.DEF understand that seriousness is on journeys if
ekki er uggað að sér.
 not is watched to REFL.DAT
 ‘so that the young understand that it is a serious matter if there is no
 watching out’
Þjóðviljinn 10, 14 January 1960, p. 7

Furthermore, we have three examples appearing within a few years, which all have the meaning ‘gobble something up’. These three verbs have the same argument structure: a dative direct object and the prepositional phrase *í sig* ‘in oneself’ (the direct object in two of these examples, (43a,c), is omitted, as it is in the English translation):

- (43) a. **Var** svo mikið **troðið í sig** að fullorðnir gátu varla staðið
 was so much stuffed in REFL.ACC that adults could hardly stand
 upp [...] up
 ‘There was so much stuffing oneself that the adults could hardly stand
 up’
Dagblaðið 160, 20 July 1981, p. 6
- b. Nú **var slafrað í sig tyrknesku kaffi** [...] now was slopped in REFL.ACC Turkish.DAT coffee.DAT
 ‘Now there was slopping up of Turkish coffee’
Lesbók Morgunblaðsins 1, 7 January 1984, p. 4
- c. Síðan **er** sest niður með diskana á hnjúnum og **úðað í sig** [...] then is sit down with plates.DEF on knees.DEF and gobbled in REFL.ACC
 ‘Then there was sitting down with the plates on the knees and stuffing oneself’
Þjóðviljinn 87-88, 14 April 1984, p. 24

We also searched for double object verbs with the anaphor as the indirect object, i.e. the IDRC discussed above. Verbs like *fá sér* ‘get oneself (something)’ are

quite common in the passive in a very informal register in Modern Icelandic. The direct object is usually in situ and in the accusative case, and the participle in the default third person neuter singular form. However, we also find passive sentences with verbs like *fá sér* where the direct object is in the nominative case and the participle agrees with it. This variant is like the Canonical Passive, except that it occurs with a reflexive pronoun. We have found a number of such examples involving the nominative agreeing variant on the Internet, e.g. on blog sites. The oldest example from *timarit.is* dates from 1930:

- (44) Eftir allar þessar þrautir **var** lent inni við fjarðarbotn, **fengin**
 after all these trials was landed inside at head.of.fjord got.F.NOM
sjer hressing eins og áður, og skoðað sig þar
 REFL.DAT refreshment.F.NOM as before and looked REFL.ACC there
 um bekki, hvílt sig í grasinu eða farið inn í „skóginn“
 around ledges rested REFL.ACC in grass.DEF or gone into in forest.DEF
 ‘After all these trials there was landing at the head of the fjord, having
 oneself some refreshment as before and looking around the ledges,
 resting in the grass or going into the forest’
Lesbók Morgunblaðsins 17, 27 April 1930, p. 132

Observe that here the participle *fengin* ‘got’ agrees in number (singular), gender (feminine) and case (nominative) with the noun *hressing* ‘refreshment’ (the neuter form is *fengið*). The other verbs here are neuter (*lent*, *skoðað* (*sig um*), *hvílt* (*sig*), *farið*), and none of these take a non-reflexive direct object.

In contemporary Icelandic the agreeing type of passive seems much more marginal than the IDRC non-agreeing type. However, there are no clear examples on *timarit.is* of the latter type, although a few examples are ambiguous, since neuter singular nouns (like *kaffi* ‘coffee’) are formally identical in nominative and accusative cases:

- (45) Þegar þessu var lokið **var fengið sér kaffi**
 when this was finished was got REFL.DAT coffee.NOM/ACC
 ‘After that, there was having oneself coffee’
Þjóðviljinn, Sjómannadagur – II. blað, 15 May 1966, p. 6

The oldest example of a passive of a ditransitive verb used with a reflexive pronoun is the collocation *mæla sér mót* ‘make an appointment’, dating from 1913. Since *mót* ‘meeting’ is neuter, we cannot be certain if the participle agrees, as in (45), or not.

- (46) Að skilnaði var mælt sér mót til
 to departure was spoken REFL.DAT meeting.NOM/ACC to
 fullnaðarkveðju heiðursgestanna [...]
 final.good-bye guests.of.honor.DEF
 ‘On leaving there was arranging to meet to say final good-bye to the guests
 of honor’
Lögberg 21, 22 May 1913, p. 1

In view of these facts, it would appear that the non-agreeing IDRC type of passive has replaced the agreeing type fairly recently.

One might assume from e.g. H.Á. Sigurðsson’s (1989) judgments on the examples in (14) above that the passive of inherently reflexive verbs (e.g. *leika sér* ‘play’) emerged before the passive of naturally reflexive verbs (e.g. *baða sig* ‘bathe’). It is not entirely clear how to analyze the data from *timarit.is* concerning this matter, as some of the earliest examples involve verbs of the kind that are hard to categorize according to the above-mentioned distinction of inherently reflexive verbs and naturally reflexive verbs. However, some verbs are easy to categorize, with the clearest example of an inherent reflexive passive appearing slightly before the first clear example of a natural Reflexive Passive. For instance, the verb *furða sig á*, first attested in the passive in 1888, would appear to be an inherent reflexive, and *búa sig út* ‘prepare’, first found in the passive in 1914, is clearly a naturally reflexive verb.³⁸

- (47) Það var búið sig út með nægileg matvæli til viku
 it was made REFL.ACC out with enough food to week
 ‘There was equipping of oneself with enough food for a week’
Heimskringla 38, 18 June 1914, p. 3

Thus, there is some evidence suggesting that inherently Reflexive Passives emerged earlier than naturally Reflexive Passives. Admittedly, however, this evidence is rather tenuous.

4.3 Summary

The examples from *timarit.is* show that the Reflexive Passive in Icelandic emerged no later than in the mid-19th century, the oldest attested example dating from 1842.³⁹ It is not quite clear whether passives of inherently reflexive verbs emerged earlier than passives of naturally reflexive verbs: if so, it seems not to

³⁸ We emphasize that it is possible that further searching will yield additional examples.

³⁹ Older examples than we have found may of course very well exist but, as was stated in the main text above, it is unfortunately not possible to conduct an automatic search of the older journals on *timarit.is*.

be a huge gap, not more than 40 years separate the first examples of “clearly inherent” and “clearly natural” Reflexive Passives.

Examples of dative in the Reflexive Passive are much more common than examples of accusative. This holds both for the older examples as well as for the younger examples. Interestingly, the same kind of preference for dative has been found in the New Passive (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2002).

From the search on *timarit.is* one might assume that the Prepositional Reflexive Passive is much younger than the Reflexive Passive. This might be the right assumption but we are not convinced that this is the case since we only searched for about thirty Prepositional Reflexive verbs, and have only a handful of examples to judge from.

5. The status of the Reflexive Passive

5.1 Background

As mentioned above, the fact that the Reflexive Passive is more widely accepted than the New Passive is comprehensible on the basis of the frequently made observation that reflexive verbs behave syntactically like intransitives in many languages (Sells, Zaenen and Zec 1987). This was also pointed out by Sigurðsson (1989:355 fn. 60), Kjartansson (1991:20), and Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2002:122). The assumption that reflexive verbs are in fact intransitives implies that simplex reflexive pronouns are not semantic arguments. In other words, a simplex reflexive pronoun is not assigned a theta-role like an ordinary argument but instantiates a “functional” syntactic element associated with the verb.

On Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir’s (2002:122) account, the Reflexive Passive played an important role in the development of the New Passive, representing “the first step in the reanalysis of the past participle from passive to syntactically active.” They argue that the New Passive contains a null subject pronoun (referring only to humans), and is therefore to be analyzed as an “impersonal active” construction. They propose that, diachronically, this null pronoun first occurred in the Impersonal Passive (of intransitive verbs), which had been subject to reanalysis from the passive to the active voice. In their view, reflexive verbs *qua* intransitives were an important intermediate stage in the spread of the null subject, giving rise to the Reflexive Passive before the null subject was eventually generalized to the passive of transitive verbs. The alleged development is sketched in (48). First, the Impersonal Passive is reanalyzed as an Impersonal Active containing a null subject (*pro*) (48a). Next, the null subject *pro* starts occurring with reflexive verbs, as in (48b). The last step in the development involves the occurrence of *pro* with transitives, i.e. the New Passive.

(48) The reanalysis of passive as active (Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir)

- a. var dansað > *pro* var dansað
was danced was danced
- b. *pro* var leikið sér, *pro* var baðað sig
was played REFL.DAT was bathed REFL.ACC
- c. *pro* var skammað mig
was scolded me.ACC

Eythórsson (2008) agrees with the earlier view that simplex reflexive pronouns can be non-arguments associated with the verb, and that this is why the Reflexive Passive has a higher acceptability rate than the New Passive. However, he disagrees with the analysis of the New Passive and the Reflexive Passive as actives containing a null subject. Eythórsson argues that the New Passive and the Reflexive Passives really are passives, and hence do not contain a syntactically present subject; rather, he proposes that the subject is implicit (“dethematized”) in these passive types, just as in the Canonical Passive.

For a detailed critique of the “Impersonal Active Analysis”, we refer the reader to Eythórsson (2008; see also Jónsson 2009). Here we focus on two points in the debate: the acceptability of *by*-phrases and the significance of the occurrence of a reflexive pronoun in the Reflexive Passive.

One of Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir’s (2002) arguments for their “Impersonal Active Analysis” is that *by*-phrases are ungrammatical in the New Passive. However, Eythórsson (2008) and Jónsson (2009) contest this “fact”, providing examples of *by*-phrases in the New Passive (see also H.Á. Sigurðsson 2011). Moreover, although we do not find *by*-phrases particularly good in the Impersonal and the Reflexive Passive, we do not find them ungrammatical, as the double question mark in the following examples is intended to indicate.

- (49) a. ??Á ballinu var dansað lengi af gestunum
at dance.DEF was danced long by guests.DEF
‘There was dancing for a long time by the guests’
- b. ??Það var baðað sig á laugardögum af öllum í sveitinni
it was bathed REFL.ACC on Saturdays by everyone in country.DEF
‘There was bathing on Saturdays by everyone in the countryside’

Although the reason for the restrictions on *by*-phrases in the Impersonal Passive is not well understood, we stress that we do not find them totally unacceptable. Thus, we do not share Thráinsson’s (2007:270) and Jónsson’s (2009:294) judgments who consider *by*-phrases ungrammatical in the Impersonal Passive.

To summarize this argument, Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir claim that the presence of a *by*-phrase entails that the relevant construction is a passive, whereas the non-acceptability of a *by*-phrase entails that it is an active. We agree with the former assumption, but not with the latter. In this connection, it should also be noted that it seems that *by*-phrases are infrequent with passive verbs at all times in the history of Icelandic (cf. Faarlund 2004).⁴⁰ It is interesting to note, moreover, that in German *by*-phrases are possible in the Impersonal Passive and the Reflexive Passive (Schäfer 2009, 2011); this shows that these are at any rate not active constructions in German, given Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir’s assumptions.

The second point we wish to address is the assumption made by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir that the occurrence of a reflexive pronoun in the Reflexive Passive necessarily presupposes a syntactic null subject. In our view, a knock-down counterargument to this view involves the simple fact that reflexive pronouns are found in passive constructions containing a nominative NP which cannot be their syntactic antecedent, for instance in the Canonical Passive in Icelandic and various other languages (see Jónsson 2009, Lødrup 2007 and Schäfer 2011). This should not be possible on the “Impersonal Active Analysis”. The following examples contain reflexives in the Canonical Passive. In (50a), from Jónsson (2009:296), the complex reflexive pronoun, which is the complement of the preposition *fyrir* ‘for’, is not of course bound by *sumt* ‘some things (NOM)’, but refers to an agentive subject not syntactically present. The same holds of (50b), in which the simplex reflexive pronoun *sér*, a complement of the noun *gaman* ‘fun’, does not refer to *margt* ‘many things (NOM)’ but to an extrasentential agentive subject.

⁴⁰ As Joel C. Wallenberg has pointed out to us, a few examples of *by*-phrases in the Impersonal Passive are found in the Icelandic Parsed Historical Corpus (IcePaHC; Wallenberg et al. 2011). Out of 320 instances of Impersonal Passive in matrix and subordinate clauses, 9 of them, i.e. 3%, contain a *by*-phrase. Two examples taken from IcePaHC are shown in (i). The first example is from a 14th century Icelandic saga, *Bandamanna saga*, and the latter is from the 18th century *Biskupasögur Jóns prófasts Halldórssonar í Hítardal*.

(i)a. en þó er fjölrætt um af öðrum mönnum hverju gegna muni.
 but still is much.discussed about by other men what mean will
 ‘but still there is a lot of discussing by other men of what the reason for this might be’
 (1350.BANDAMENNM.NAR-SAG,.350; Wallenberg et al. 2011)

b. Er því hlaupið til af mörgum og forvitnast, hvað í efnun sé.
 is therefore run to by many and inquired what in matter is
 ‘Therefore, there is reacting quickly by many and inquiring about matters’
 (1725.BISKUPASOGUR.NAR-REL,.817; Wallenberg et al. 2011)

- (50) a. Sumt er bara gert fyrir sjálfan sig
 some.NOM is only done for self.ACC REFL.ACC
 ‘Some things are only done for oneself’
- b. Margt er sér til gamans gert
 many.NOM is REFL.DAT to fun done.NOM
 ‘Many things are done for one’s own amusement’

These structures have parallels in other languages, for example English, as in the following example from Baker, Johnson and Roberts (1989:228).

(51) Such privileges should be kept to oneself

Moreover, Lødrup (2007:13) reports that some younger speakers of Norwegian allow a complex reflexive pronoun with a generic interpretation to occur with no binder:

- (52) En motorsag kan skade seg selv og andre
 a chainsaw can injure REFL self and others
 ‘A chainsaw can injure oneself and others’

Continuing with Icelandic, it is of special interest to consider the ditransitive type with an agreeing past participle, shown above in (44). This example, repeated as (53), involves the ditransitive reflexive verb *fá sér* (*eitthvað*) ‘get oneself (something)’, in which the past participle agrees with the noun in the nominative case.

- (53) [var] fengin sjer hressing
 was got.F.NOM REFL.DAT refreshment.F.NOM
 ‘There was having oneself refreshment’

Clearly, the occurrence of a nominative object NP (*hressing* ‘refreshment’) in such examples is a serious obstacle to the assumption of a syntactically present null subject as an antecedent for the reflexive pronoun. Since the verb *fá* ‘get’ (also the reflexive *fá sér* (*eitthvað*)) takes a nominative subject, a putative *pro* subject could not be in an oblique case, in which it would have to be, given the incompatibility of a nominative subject with a nominative object in the same clause. As suggested in section 4.2.3, the type in (53) may be an earlier stage in the development of the non-agreeing IDRC *Það var fengið sér öllara* ‘There was having oneself a beer’.

In this connection it is interesting to note the structure exemplified in the text passage in (54), in which the nominative does not agree with the participle; in *fengið sér köld pitsusneið* ‘having oneself a cold pizza slice’ the form of the

adjective makes it clear that the NP is in the nominative (the accusative would be *kalda pitsusneið*):

- (54) Það er spilaður póker eða Playstation til 5 á morgnana
 it is played.M.NOM poker.M.NOM on Playstation to 5 at mornings.DEF
 í mörgum klúbbum og svo vaknað klukkan 3 og **fengið sér**
 in many clubs and then woken.up o'clock 3 and got REFL.DAT
köld pitsusneið og svo drifið sig á æfingu
 cold.NOM pizza.slice.NOM and then hurried REFL.ACC at practice
 'Poker or Playstation is played until 5 in the morning in many football
 clubs and then there is waking up at 3 o'clock and having oneself a cold
 pizza slice and then hurrying to practice'
 (male sports analyst in a TV show in 2010, b. 1980)

To judge only from the data given in (54), the speaker uses a Canonical Passive (*Það er spilaður póker*) of a transitive verb and does not seem to have the New Passive. Still he uses the Reflexive Passive, both of a monotransitive verb (*drifið sig*) and of a ditransitive verb (*fengið sér köld pitsusneið*). It is tempting to regard the type with the non-agreeing nominative as an intermediate stage in the diachronic development between the agreeing type and the non-agreeing IDRC (with accusative), as outlined in (55) (cf. Árnadóttir and E.F. Sigurðsson 2008 for similar ideas on the development of the New Passive):

(55) **The origin and development of IDRC**

- (i) Nominative agreement with the participle
 var **fengin** sér **köld** **pitsusneið**
 was got.F.NOM REFL.DAT cold.NOM pizza.slice.NOM
- (ii) Nominative – non-agreement with the participle (default form)
 var **fengið** sér **köld** **pitsusneið**
 was got REFL.DAT cold.NOM pizza.slice.NOM
- (iii) Accusative – non-agreement with the participle (default form) (IDRC)
 var **fengið** sér **kalda** **pitsusneið**
 was got REFL.DAT cold.ACC pizza.slice.ACC

Passive constructions of ditransitive reflexive verbs containing a nominative NP also occur in other languages. Thus, examples such as (56) are accepted by some German speakers (Schäfer 2009, 2011). Crucially, although the sentence may be marginal, the nominative is strongly preferred over the accusative, which is ungrammatical according to Schäfer (2009).

(56) Anschließend wurde sich ein/*einen Hamburger gekauft
afterwards was REFL a.NOM/*ACC hamburger bought
'Afterwards, there was buying oneself a hamburger'

As stated in example (6) above, repeated here as (57), German also has a Reflexive Passive with verbs taking the simplex anaphor *sich* (Schäfer 2011). The fact that agentive *by*-phrases are possible with these verbs is a clear sign that this construction really is a passive in German.

(57) Hier wurde sich (von den Römern) gewaschen
here was REFL (by the Romans) washed
'Here there was washing (by the Romans)'

In some Norwegian varieties, a passive construction involving ditransitive reflexive verbs is also said to occur (T. Åfarli, p.c.); note that it is not possible to determine the case of the direct object, given the lack of morphological case distinctions of NPs in Norwegian.

(58) Det ble kjøpt seg øl
it was bought REFL beer
'There was buying oneself a beer'

Thus, the Reflexive Passive occurs to a limited degree in Norwegian (see Åfarli 1992:128 and Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir 2009 for discussion), although this is not mentioned in standard descriptions of Norwegian (cf. Faarlund et al. 1997:847). The examples in (7) above are repeated here as (59).

(59) a. Det vart rulla seg i graset
it was rolled REFL in grass.DEF
'There was rolling in the grass'

b. Det blir bygd seg hus
it becomes built REFL house
'There is building oneself a house'

As discussed by Maling and Sigurjónsdóttir (2009), the complex reflexive pronoun *seg selv* 'self' is not allowed, as shown in (60) (cf. Maling 2006).

(60) Det ble låst seg (*selv) inn i fabrikken
it was locked REFL (self) inside in factory.DEF
'There was locking inside the factory'

right of the finite auxiliary in Stylistic Fronting constructions (63a), and corresponding examples are also found in the Reflexive Passive (63b):

(63) a. Hefner, sem **leikið** hefur **sér** með fögrum konum
 Hefner who played has REFL.DAT with beautiful women
 og brjóstamiklum [...] and big-breasted
 ‘Hefner, who has played around with beautiful and big breasted women’
Mánudagsblaðið, 18 August 1969, p. 11

b. [...] þar sem **leikið** var **sér** með hagsmuni ríkissjóðs
 where played was REFL.DAT with interests state.treasury
 ‘Where there was playing with the interests of the state treasury’
 Member of the Icelandic Parliament in 1998, b. 1942;
<http://www.althingi.is/altext/122/02/r16170204.shtml>

The simplex reflexive pronoun cannot be adjacent to the fronted main verb to the left of the auxiliary (e.g. **leikið sér hefur*). In this respect the simplex reflexive pronoun is clearly different from the middle marker *-st*, which is a suffix attached to the verb, as e.g. seen by the fact that the verb plus suffix occurs to the left of the auxiliary: *drepist hefur* ‘died has’.

The syntactic independence exhibited by the simplex reflexive pronoun is an argument against its clitic status. Therefore, the failure of the conjunction test must be a manifestation of something else, which we believe to be its lack of a semantic argument status. We suggest that the conjunction test has a bearing on the determination of the argument status of the reflexive pronoun in that it is not (or only marginally) possible to conjoin a fully-fledged argument and an element which is only a syntactic argument but not a semantic argument. We propose that this is the key to an understanding of the fact that the Reflexive Passive is grammatical for speakers for whom the New Passive is ungrammatical. The simplex reflexive pronoun in the Reflexive Passive is a syntactic argument only, but the object NP (including complex reflexive pronouns and phrases containing possessive reflexive pronouns) in the New Passive of transitive verbs is both a syntactic and a semantic argument.

Although the reflexive pronoun is not a semantic argument with reflexive verbs, there are instances where it occurs in argument positions, and therefore must be both a syntactic and a semantic argument. First, in subject-to-object raising structures it is clear that the simplex reflexive pronoun is a regular argument:

(64) a. Jón kveður sig / *sjálfan sig vera samþykkan þessu
 Jón says REFL.ACC / self.ACC REFL.ACC be agreeing this
 ‘Jón says he agrees with this’

- b. Jón telur sér / *sjálfum sér hafa lynt
 Jón thinks REFL.DAT / self.DAT REFL.DAT have got.along
 við Guðmund
 with Guðmundur
 ‘Jón thinks he got along with Guðmundur’
- c. Jón telur sér / *sjálfum sér hafa verið
 Jón thinks REFL.DAT / self.DAT REFL.DAT have been
 mismunað
 discriminated.against
 ‘Jón thinks he was discriminated against’

In each example in (64), the reflexive pronoun is in fact a subject of the infinitive clause. The complex reflexive pronoun can only occur in object position, and therefore it is out in such structures, whereas the simplex must occur.

Second, the simplex reflexive is also an argument in Long-Distance Reflexivization structures involving verbs taking oblique subjects in the embedded clause:

- (65) Jón telur að sig / *sjálfan sig vanta peninga
 Jón thinks that REFL.ACC / self.ACC REFL.ACC lack money.ACC
 ‘Jón thinks that he needs money’

Third, with ditransitives like *gefa* ‘give’, the complex reflexive pronoun is strongly preferred, while the simplex is usually far less felicitous, if not ungrammatical altogether. Conversely, in a derived meaning (‘give a premise’), only the simplex can occur:

- (66) a. Jón gaf ??sér / sjálfum sér / Siggu bók
 Jón gave REFL.DAT / self.DAT REFL.DAT / Sigga.DAT book
 í jólagjöf
 in Christmas.present
 ‘Jón gave ??self / himself / Sigga a book as a Christmas present’
- b. Jón gaf sér / ??sjálfum sér / *Siggu þessa forsendu
 Jón gave REFL.DAT / self.DAT REFL.DAT / Sigga.DAT this premise
 ‘Jón gave self / ??himself / *Sigga this premise’, i.e. ‘Jón proposed this premise’

Moreover, while simplex reflexive objects occurring with naturally or inherently reflexive verbs cannot usually be topicalized (67a), complex reflexive pronoun objects of naturally disjoint (*gefa*) verbs can (67b):

- (67) a. ***Sér** getur hann ekki leikið
 REFL.DAT can he not play
 ‘He cannot play’
- b. **Sjálfum sér** getur hann ekki hjálpað
 self.DAT REFL.DAT can he not help
 ‘He cannot help himself’

This is also the case with prepositional complements involving a reflexive pronoun; if the reflexive pronoun is an argument, it must be complex.

- (68) Hann horfði á sjálfan sig / ??sig í speglinum
 He looked at self.ACC REFL.ACC / REFL.ACC in mirror.DEF
 ‘He looked at himself in the mirror’

Fourth, in resultative constructions of the type in (69) only non-argumental simplex reflexive pronouns (“fake reflexives”) can occur (cf. Whelpton 2011). A similar structure with a PP is also found. Both of these reflexive types can be passivized, as was mentioned above in (25) and is further exemplified in (69) and (70).

- (69) a. Hann öskraði sig hásan
 he screamed REFL.ACC hoarse.ACC
 ‘He screamed himself hoarse’
- b. Það var öskrað sig hásan
 it was screamed REFL.ACC hoarse.ACC
- (70) a. Hann borðaði á sig gat
 he ate on REFL.ACC hole.ACC/NOM
 ‘He ate until he exploded’
- b. Það var borðað á sig gat
 it was eaten on REFL.ACC hole.ACC/NOM
 ‘There was eating until one exploded’

Evaluating the evidence presented in connection with the above points, it turns out that there is a case for positing the status of the simplex reflexive pronoun as a syntactic, but not a semantic, argument. One reason for this is the

fact that co-ordination of a simplex reflexive and a non-reflexive pronoun is generally not possible and that the occurrence of the simplex reflexive pronoun in object positions is disfavored (or even ungrammatical). Moreover, as shown by the results of the surveys reported on above (cf. sections 2 and 3), the acceptance of passive sentences (the Reflexive Passive) involving the simplex reflexive pronoun by non-New Passive speakers further supports the analysis of the reflexive pronoun in the Reflexive Passive as a syntactic, rather than a semantic argument. There is a crucial difference between the simplex and the complex reflexive pronouns in this respect: reflexive verbs taking a simplex reflexive pronoun receive a high acceptance rate among non-New Passive speakers whereas verbs taking a complex reflexive pronoun are judged similarly to the New Passive.

Conversely, there are no obvious counterarguments against the suggestion that the simplex reflexive pronoun is not a semantic argument: the fact that it exhibits a certain degree of syntactic independence, in the sense that it is not necessarily directly adjacent to the verb, is compatible with its status as a syntactic argument only. The same is true of the fact that the reflexive pronoun shows case distinctions (accusative, dative and genitive) in contrast to, for example, German *sich*; the case morphology does not, in and of itself, mean that the simplex reflexive pronoun must be a semantic argument in addition to being a syntactic argument. As to the question of clitic status, on the other hand, only the restrictions on coordination might suggest that the simplex reflexive pronoun is a clitic, but the syntactic independence of the reflexive pronoun seen in (63), speaks against it.

To conclude this discussion, we can say that simplex reflexive pronouns are semantically dependent on the verbs which select for them, and as such they are not to be analyzed as semantic arguments; on the other hand, they exhibit a certain degree of syntactic independence which suggests that their status is as syntactic arguments only. The morphological distinctions exhibited by the simplex reflexive pronoun are also compatible with the latter status.

Essentially, our analysis can be stated as follows: In both the New Passive and the Reflexive Passive structural accusative case is preserved, apparently flouting Burzio's Generalization (see Eythórsson 2008 for details and further references; see also Woolford 2003). The difference between the two passive types is that in the New Passive the accusative is assigned to an NP which is both a syntactic and a semantic argument, but in the Reflexive Passive the accusative is assigned to an argument that is only syntactic. Moreover, the reflexive pronoun is morphologically "defective" in that it has no nominative form, so that a Canonical Passive of reflexive verbs is not a possibility; therefore, the accusative (dative, genitive) form of the reflexive pronoun can occur in the passive by default, as it were.

The conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that violations of Burzio's Generalization are tolerated to a much greater degree with arguments that are

only syntactic (and morphologically defective) than with fully-fledged, syntactic and semantic arguments. Clearly, however, further investigation is needed to illuminate this matter in more detail than is possible here. Moreover, a greater question is why do many speakers find the Reflexive Passive less acceptable than the Impersonal Passive, which is accepted by everybody. The answer to this question is quite simply that a reflexive object pronoun is incompatible with a passive construction where it cannot be bound by a syntactic antecedent, thus violating Principle A of the Binding Theory. Nevertheless, this “constraint” can be overruled, as the binder can be extrasentential, as seen in various structures, for example in occurrences of the reflexive pronoun in the Canonical Passive and in noun phrases such as *skoðanir á sjálfum sér* ‘opinions of oneself’ (see also Lødrup 2007 for examples from Norwegian). In our view, it is the combination of the argument status of the object NP and the binding facts which accounts for the Passive Acceptability Hierarchy. While simplex reflexive pronouns obey Principle A of the Binding Theory, the requirement that the binder must be present syntactically is far less strict than the incompatibility of accusative case-marked arguments in a passive. However, even the accusative case-marking “constraint” can be violated, although the violation is easier with arguments that are only syntactic than with arguments which are both syntactic and semantic.

Finally, we would like to tie up some loose ends. First, we reiterate that that we consider the use of the complex reflexive pronoun in the passive, e.g. *Það er drepð sjálfan sig* ‘There is taking of one’s life’ in (17) above, to be an instance of the New Passive, and not the Reflexive Passive, since the complex reflexive pronoun is both a syntactic and a semantic argument of the verb. Thus, non-New Passive speakers who accept the Reflexive Passive can say *Það var drifið sig á ball* but not *Það er drepð sjálfan sig*, since the complex reflexive pronoun must not be contained within an NP semantic argument. These speakers can use reflexive pronouns of inherently and naturally reflexive verbs in the passive, but not of naturally disjoint verbs. In this respect, it is interesting to note that Schäfer (2011) reports on a study which reveals that, in German, passives of naturally disjoint verbs with reflexive pronouns are judged much worse than passives of inherently and naturally reflexive verbs. In this regard, the Reflexive Passive behaves much the same in Icelandic and German. The reason that the passive of naturally disjoint reflexives is ungrammatical in German is that such a construction would instantiate the New Passive—which German does not have. To emphasize the point we are making here: the Reflexive Passive is not the same as the New Passive.

Second, as we have previously pointed out, a further investigation of the Reflexive Passive taking prepositional complements is needed. We speculate that the difference between the use of the simplex (20) and complex reflexive pronoun (19) in this type is the same as between the Reflexive Passive with a simplex (16) and a complex reflexive pronoun (17). If we are on the right track

in this, the difference is in both cases a question of a syntactic and semantic argument (complex reflexive pronoun) vs. solely a semantic one (simplex reflexive pronoun). There remains, however, to be explained why the Reflexive Passive taking a possessive reflexive pronoun within an NP complement of a preposition seems to be as acceptable as the Reflexive Passive taking prepositional complement which is a simplex reflexive pronoun. We will not attempt that here.

A final issue has to do with diachrony. We have not found any examples of the Reflexive Passive in Old Icelandic; as discussed in section 4 above, the oldest examples are from the mid-19th century. There is in our view no reason to assume that the reflexive pronoun with reflexive verbs ever had a different status than it does in contemporary Icelandic, i.e. that it ever was a semantic argument; rather, although it was syntactically independent, it was always semantically dependent on the verb. In this connection, it is instructive to consider the emergence of the middle suffix *-st* in Icelandic (Old Icelandic *-sk*). We propose that the first step in the development of this suffix in pre-Old Icelandic was the reanalysis of a reflexive syntactic argument as a non-argument. Subsequently, the reflexive non-argument was cliticized as *-sk* onto the verb, resulting in its becoming a morphological affix. It is clear that this development did not affect all reflexive verbs simultaneously, but happened at different times over an extended period in the history of Icelandic. In fact, we can still see such changes happening in Modern Icelandic, where the reflexive pronoun has become *-st* with a few verbs among some speakers: *drífa sig* ‘hurry’ > *drífast*.⁴¹

(71) a. [...] svo **drifumst** við heim til hans og fengum vöflur!!
 then hurried we home to his and got waffles
 ‘then we hurried to his house and got waffles’
<http://nattfatagellur.blogcentral.is/blog/2006/12/5/er-kominn-timi-a-mig-i-blogg/>

b. Svo var **drifist** upp um hádegið
 then was hurried up on noon.DEF
 ‘Then there was hurrying up at noon’
http://nietze.bloggar.is/blogg/351730/Thid_erud_fallegt_par_Ma_bjoda_ykkur_opp_a_afbrigdilegt_kynlif

⁴¹ It may be mentioned that the verb *drífast* is neither known to us nor most people we have asked. There are only a few examples of this use found on the Internet. Most of those are from bloggers in the East of Iceland. An informant, b. 1986, who was raised in this area says this use is common there.

5.3 Summary

As we have discussed, both in the New Passive and the Reflexive Passive structural accusative case is preserved, apparently flouting Burzio's Generalization. We have argued that the difference between the two passive types is that in the New Passive the accusative is assigned to an NP which is both a syntactic and a semantic argument, but in the Reflexive Passive the accusative is assigned to an argument that is only syntactic; besides, the reflexive pronoun is morphologically "defective" in that there is no nominative form. We conclude that violations of Burzio's Generalization are tolerated to a much greater degree with arguments that are only syntactic (and morphologically defective) than with fully-fledged, syntactic and semantic arguments. We have also suggested that the reason why many speakers find the Reflexive Passive less acceptable than the Impersonal Passive is that in the Reflexive Passive, there is no syntactic antecedent available for the reflexive object pronoun to be bound by; however, this "constraint" can be overruled, increasing the acceptability of the Reflexive Passive. In our view, it is the combination of the binding facts and the argument status of the object NP in the different passive types which accounts for the Passive Acceptability Hierarchy.

6. Conclusion

In this paper we have focused on reflexive verbs in Icelandic and their occurrence in passives, subsumed here under the label Reflexive Passive. We have also discussed comparative evidence from other languages, in particular German and Norwegian. Based on our examination of passive-type sentences in contemporary Icelandic, drawn from recent surveys, we have proposed that their acceptability is subject to an implicational hierarchy which we term the Passive Acceptability Hierarchy. The nature of this hierarchy was further illuminated from a diachronic perspective, by the results of a corpus-based search of reflexive passives in Icelandic journals (*timarit.is*), from the early 19th century onwards. Finally, we have sketched an analysis of the Reflexive Passive, comparing it with the New Passive and parallels in German and Norwegian. We argued that simplex reflexive pronouns are semantically dependent on the verbs which select for them, and as such they are not to be analyzed as semantic arguments; however, given that they exhibit some syntactic independence we claim that their status is that of syntactic arguments only. Despite the preservation of structural accusative case in both the Reflexive Passive and the New Passive, we assume that they really are passives, and not active constructions involving a null *pro* subject. While it is clear that in both cases Burzio's Generalization is violated, we have proposed that such violations are tolerated to a much greater degree with arguments that are only syntactic (and morphologically defective), as in the case of the Reflexive Passive, than with fully-fledged, syntactic and semantic arguments, as in the New Passive. Moreover, it seems clear to us that the reason why the Reflexive Passive is often

deemed less acceptable than the Impersonal Passive is that a reflexive object pronoun is not bound by a syntactic antecedent, thus violating Principle A of the Binding Theory; however, this “constraint” can be overruled, increasing the acceptability of the Reflexive Passive. In combination, the binding facts and the argument status of the object NP in the different passive types account for the Passive Acceptability Hierarchy.

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Appendix

Below we show examples found on *tímarit.is* (<http://timarit.is>), an open access digital library of scanned newspapers and periodicals, in September 2010. The list includes all examples predating 1910, but only the oldest example of each verb after 1910.

1842 flýta sér 'hurry'	Þókti og mönnum sem mjög væri flýtt sér með að byggja þau [...] thought also men that very was hurried REFL.DAT with to build them 'People also thought that there was a lot of hurrying to build them' <i>Skírnir</i> 16, 1 January 1842, p. 51
1850 skipta sér af 'interfere with'	[...] og ekki var skipt sér af að vatna því [...] and not was interfered REFL.DAT of to water it 'and there was no interfering with watering them [i.e. the sheep]' <i>Lanztíðindi</i> 11–12, 28 February 1850, p. 43
1859 skipta sér af 'interfere with'	[...] að ekkert hefir verið skipt sér af því nú í fullar 18 vikur [...] that nothing has been interfered REFL.DAT of it now in full 18 weeks [...] 'that there has been no interfering with it for full 18 weeks now' <i>Þjóðólfur</i> 35–36, 30 September 1859, p. 141
1868 snúa sér 'turn'	[...] heldr er strax frá upphafi snúið sér að fjárhagsmálinu [...] rather is right.away from beginning turned REFL.DAT to financial.issue.DEF 'but instead there is turning to the financial issue right from the beginning' <i>Þjóðólfur</i> 32–33, 23 June 1858, p. 131
1878 skipta sér af 'interfere with'	[...] en síðan einstakir menn hafa fengið verzlunina í hendur sér, er ekki skipt sér neitt af því. [...] but since unique men have got business.DEF in hands REFL.DAT is not interfered REFL.DAT nothing of it 'but since individuals have been handed over the business, there is no interfering at all with it' <i>Þjóðólfur</i> 29, 2 November 1878, p. 118
1879 skipta sér af 'interfere with'	[...] þar víst aldrei er skipt sér af, hvort þær hafa heilbrigðisvottorð eða ekki. [...] since apparently never is interfered REFL.DAT of whether they have health.certificate or not 'since apparently there was never any interfering with them having a health certificate or not' <i>Skuld</i> 63, 3 February 1879, pp. 25–27
1887 skipta sér af 'interfere with'	Á skipum „Línunnar“ er ekki skipt sér af því, þótt nokkur yfirvigt sé [...] on ships Line.DEF is not interfered REFL.DAT of it although some excess.weight is 'On the ships of Línan, there is no interfering with some excess weight' <i>Austri</i> 1, 14 February 1887, p. 3

1888 furða sig 'wonder'	Í grein þessari er furðað sig á þessari ályktun [...] in article this is surprised REFL.ACC on this conclusion 'In this article there is surprising at this conclusion' <i>Þjóðólfur</i> 3–4, 20 January 1888, p. 9
1890 skipta sér af 'interfere with'	[...] hefir ekki í Mýrahreppi verið skipt sér af hinum ákveðna has not in M. been interfered REFL.DAT of the decided leitardegi. search.day 'in Mýrar district there has been no interfering with the appointed search day' <i>Þjóðviljinn + Þjóðviljinn ungi</i> 12, 10 March 1890, p. 46
1890 flýta sér 'hurry'	[...] og svo var flýtt sjer að kveðja [...] and then was hurried REFL.DAT to say.good-bye 'and then there was hurrying to say good-bye' <i>Lögberg</i> 19, 21 May 1890, p. 6
1891 skemmta sjer 'have fun'	Á undan og eptir leiknum, var skemmt sjer með dansi. on before and after game.DEF was entertained REFL.DAT with dance 'Before and after the game, there was having fun dancing' <i>Heimskringla</i> 17, 22 April 1891, p. 1
1892 koma sér saman um 'agree on'	[...] ef ekki væri komið sér saman um þau á almennum if not was come REFL.DAT together about them on general þjóðfundi [...] national.assembly 'if there was no agreeing on them at a general national assembly' <i>Norðurljósið</i> 7, 8 April 1892, p. 25
1893 skemmta sjer 'have fun'	[...] þar að auki var skemmt sjer með dansi og söng. there in addition was entertained REFL.DAT with dance and song 'in addition, there was having fun dancing and singing' <i>Íslenzki good-templar</i> 3, 1 February 1893, p. 24
1893 reiða sig á 'rely on'	[...] er því mikið reitt sig á sjávarafla [...] is therefore much relied REFL.ACC on fish catch 'therefore, there is relying a great deal on fish catch' <i>Þjóðólfur</i> 23, 19 May 1893, p. 90
1893 hvíla sig 'rest'	Í tveim hinum smærri tjöldum var veitt og hvílt sig. in two the smaller tents was offered and rested REFL.ACC 'In two of the smaller tents there was offering [of food and drinks] and resting' <i>Lögberg</i> 63, 16 August 1893, p. 2

1894 leika sér 'play'	Um kveldið, [...] var dansað og leikið sér dálítið [...] in evening.DEF was danced and played REFL.DAT a little 'In the evening, there was dancing and playing a little' <i>Fjallkonan</i> 38, 20 September 1894, p. 151
1897 koma sér saman um 'agree on'	[...] og þar verið komið sér saman um orðalag það, er mest and there been come REFL.DAT together about phrasing that that most þótti undir komið [...] thought under come 'and there, there had been agreeing on the phrasing that was thought most important' <i>Skírnir</i> , 1 January 1897, p. 16
1898 hvíla sig 'rest'	Gengið 25 sekúndur, hvílt sig 35 sekúndur o. s. frv. o. s. frv. walked 25 seconds rested REFL.ACC 35 seconds etc. etc. 'There was walking for 25 seconds, resting for 35 seconds etc., etc.' <i>Dagskrá</i> 103, 18 May 1898, p. 426
1898 flýta sér 'hurry'	[...] og því var flýtt sjer að því að draga körfuna upp [...] and therefore was hurried REFL.DAT to it to pull basket.DEF up 'and therefore there was hurrying in pulling the basket up' <i>Framsókn</i> , 1 September 1898, p. 36
1898 reiða sig á 'rely on'	[...] og svo var einnig búist við og reitt sig á, að and then was also expected with and relied REFL.ACC on that farmurinn væri seldur samkv. samningnum [...] cargo.DEF was sold according deal.DEF 'and there was also expecting and relying on the cargo being sold according to the deal' <i>Bjarki</i> 48, 3 December 1898, p. 190
1900 skemmta sér 'have fun'	Var drukkið, dansað og skemmt sér fram á nótt. was drunk danced and entertained REFL.DAT towards on night 'There was drinking, dancing and having fun into the night' <i>Þjóðólfur</i> 37, 10 August 1900, p. 146
1900 flýta sér 'hurry'	[...] ef ekki væri flýtt sér nógu mikið að smella því á if not was hurried REFL.DAT enough much to click it on landið [...] country.DEF 'if there was not enough hurrying to put it on the country' <i>Þjóðólfur</i> 33, 13 July 1900, p. 131

1901 skemmta sér 'have fun'	Að því búnu [...] verður gengið til bæjarþinghússins aptur, og þar to it done will.be walked to town.hall again and there skemmt sér við: Ræðuhöld, hljóðfæraslátt, dans, entertained REFL.DAT with giving.speeches playing.instruments dance leiki o. fl. games etc. 'After that, there will be walking to the town hall again and having fun there with speeches, music, dancing, games and more' <i>Þjóðvilinn + Þjóðviljinn ungi</i> 51-52, 12 January 1901, p. 205
1901 skemmta sér 'have fun'	Að því loknu var aptur gengið til bæjarþinghússins um kl. II og to it done was again walked to town.hall around o'clock 11 and þar skemmt sér við ræðuhöld, hljóðfæraslátt, dans, there entertained REFL.DAT with giving.speeches playing.instruments dance leiki o. fl. [...] games etc. 'After that, there was walking again to the town hall around 11 o'clock and having fun there with speeches, music, dancing, games and more' <i>Þjóðólfrur</i> 4, 18 January 1901, p. 15
1901 skemmta sér 'have fun'	[...] var þar skemmt sér með ræðum, söng, dansi og spilum [...] was there entertained REFL.DAT with speeches song dance and cards 'there, there was having fun with speeches, singing, dancing and playing cards' <i>Austri</i> 9, 7 March 1901, p. 23
1901 skemmta sér 'have fun'	[...] var skemmt sér við íþróttir, söng og dans fram á nótt. was entertained REFL.DAT with sports song and dance towards on night 'there was having fun with sports, singing and dancing into the night' <i>Austri</i> 24, 29 June 1901, p. 80
1901 skemmta sér 'have fun'	Var skemmt sér í Borgarfirði við dans og drykkju, glaum og was entertained REFL.DAT in B. with dance and drinking noise and gleði [...] happiness 'There was having fun in Borgarfjörður, dancing and drinking, being merry and gay' <i>Austri</i> 27, 25 July 1901, p. 91
1902 skemmta sér 'have fun'	Þar var drukkið og dansað og skemmt sér dætt langt there was drunk and danced and entertained REFL.DAT merrily long fram á nótt. towards on night 'There, there was drinking and dancing and having good fun well into the night' <i>Þjóðólfrur</i> 7, 14 February 1902, bls 27

1902 skemmta sér 'have fun'	[...] og var þar skemmt sér við söng og dans og annan and was there entertained REFL.DAT with song and dance and another gleðskap [...] party 'and there, there was having fun singing and dancing and partying in other ways' <i>Þjóðólfur</i> 41, 10 October 1902, p. 163
1903 skemmta sér 'have fun'	Auk þess, var skemmt sér með orgelspili, söng og dansi [...] beside it was entertained REFL.DAT with playing.organ song and dance 'In addition, there was having fun playing the organ, singing and dancing' <i>Þjóðólfur</i> 8, 20 February 1903, p. 31
1905 skemmta sér 'have fun'	Svo var skemmt sér við leik og dans [...] then was entertained REFL.DAT with playing and dance 'Then there was having fun playing and dancing' <i>Austri</i> 2, 20 January 1905, p. 6
1905 flýta sér 'hurry'	Var flýtt sér að ná landi á hinni næstu vagnlest [...] was hurried REFL.DAT to get land on the next carriage' 'There was hurrying to get to the shore with the next carriage' <i>Lögberg</i> 25, 22 June 1905, p. 2
1907 skemmta sér 'have fun'	Síðan var skemmt sér við ræðuhöld, söng og dans. then was entertained REFL.DAT with giving.speeches song and dance 'Then there was having fun with speeches, singing and dancing' <i>Austri</i> 31, 3 August 1907, p. 112
1907 hraða sér 'hurry'	[...] enda mun hafa verið hraðað sér með það vegna since will have been hurried REFL.DAT with it because of konungskomunnar. king's.arrival.DEF 'since apparently there was hurrying with it because of the King's visit' <i>Þjóðólfur</i> 31, 19 July 1907, p. 119
1908 leika sér 'play'	Að ástinni er leikið sér eins og sveinar leika að knetti. with love.DEF is played REFL.DAT as boys play with ball 'There is playing with love like boys play with a ball' <i>Frækorn</i> 16–17, 30 July 1908, p. 124
1909 skemmta sér 'have fun'	Síðan var skemmt sér við söng, íþróttir og dans. then was entertained REFL.DAT with song sports and dance 'Then there was having fun singing, playing sports and dancing' <i>Austri</i> 21, 25 June 1909, p. 79

1909 færa sig 'move'	[...] og smátt og smátt fært sig betur upp á skaptið [...] and little and little moved REFL.ACC better up on shaft.DEF 'and little by little there was becoming more pushy' <i>Þjóðólfur</i> 38, 10 September 1909, p. 148
1910 leika sér 'play'	Svo verður dansað og leikið sér til kl. 12. then will.be danced and played REFL.DAT until o'clock 12 'Then there will be dancing and playing until 12 o'clock' <i>Ísafold</i> 80, 18 December 1910, p. 314
1912 halla sér 'lean on'	En nú mun verða hallað sér að tilboði Siemens og Schuckert [...] but now will will.be leaned REFL.DAT to offer S. and S. 'But now there will be leaning towards the offer of Siemens and Schuckert' <i>Austri</i> 19, 13 May 1912, p. 65
1913 mæla sér mót 'arrange to meet'	Að skilnaði var mælt sér mót til fullnaðarkveðju to departure was spoken REFL.DAT meeting .NOM/ACC to final.good-bye heiðursgestanna.DEF [...] guests.of.honor 'On leaving there was arranging oneself to meet to say final good-bye to the guests of honor' <i>Lögberg</i> 21, 22 May 1913, p. 1
1914 gjöra sig út 'prepare'	En vanalega var algjörlega gjört sig út til grasa skömmu fyrir but usually was totally made REFL.ACC out to grasses shortly before fráfærur [...] separation.of.sheep.and.lambs 'But usually there was preparing oneself fully to collect herbs shortly before the sheep and lambs were separated' <i>Heimskringla</i> , 18 June 1914, p. 3
1914 búa sig 'equip'	Það var búið sig út með nægileg matvæli til viku [...] it was made REFL.ACC out with enough food to week 'There was equipping oneself with enough food for a week' <i>Heimskringla</i> 38, 18 June 1914, p. 3
1930 fá sjer 'get oneself' skoða sig um 'look around' hvíla sig 'rest'	Eftir allar þessar þrautir var lent inni við fjarðarbotn, fengin after all these trials was landed inside at head of fjord got.F.NOM sjer hressing eins og áður, og skoðað sig þar um REFL.DAT refreshment.F.NOM as before and looked REFL.ACC there around bekki, hvílt sig í grasinu eða farið inn í „skóginn“ [...] ledges rested REFL.ACC in grass.DEF or gone into in forest.DEF 'After all these trials there was landing at the head of the fjord, having oneself some refreshment as before and looking around the ledges, resting in the grass or going into the forest' <i>Lesbók Morgunblaðsins</i> 17, 27 April 1930, p. 132

1930 herða sig 'toughen up'	Verður hert sig að klára það og því notað í allar will.be hardened REFL.ACC to finish it and therefore used in all máltíðir [...] meals 'There will be toughening up to finish it and therefore it will be used for all meals' <i>Spegillinn</i> 14, 16 August 1930, p. 125
1931 leggja sig fram 'make an effort'	[...] því ekki var lagt sig fram um að láta í té beztu because not was laid REFL.ACC forward about to put in offer best hlunnindi, fæðu eða þægindi handa emigröntum í þá tíð. perks food or comfort for emigrants in that period 'because there was no making of an effort to grant the best perks, food or comfort to the emigrants during that time' <i>Lögberg</i> 33, 13 August 1931, p. 1
1935 renna sér 'slide'	Þá varð allt að ganga í hendingskasti, hvort sem farið var upp then must everything to go in haste whether that gone was up eða rennt sér niður hlíðina. or slid REFL.DAT down slope.DEF 'Then everything had to go very fast, whether there was going up or sliding down the slope' <i>Ljósberinn</i> 1–2, 12 January 1935, p. 13
1936 hreiðra um sig 'nestle'	[...] en því næst hreiðrað um sig af nýju í flatsænginni. but it next nestled around REFL.ACC of new in pallet.DEF 'but then there was again nestling on the pallet' <i>Vísir</i> 90, 31 March 1936, p. 2
1940 fikra sig 'inch along'	Eins var farið að, þegar Tómas var þýddur á japönsku, þá var smátt same was gone to when T. was translated to Japanese then was little og smátt fikrað sig austur eftir [...] and little inched REFL.ACC east after 'The same was done when Tómas was translated to Japanese, then there was inching along little by little towards the east' <i>Spegillinn</i> 4, 23 February 1940, p. 29
1943 beita sér 'put emphasis'	Ennfremur var beitt sér fyrir því að inneign væri greidd að moreover was put emphasis REFL.DAT for it that credit was paid to einhverju leyti í peningum [...] some respect in money 'Moreover, there was placing emphasis on having the credit partly paid in cash' <i>Sjómannablaðið Víkingur</i> 11–12, 1 December 1943, p. 266

1944 hætta sér 'risk'	[...] og það hefir sennilega ráðið því, að ekki var hætt sér út and it has probably decided it that not was risked REFL.DAT out á þá braut. on that track 'and that has probably been decisive in there being no risking of going in this direction' <i>Vísir</i> 227, 11 November 1944, p. 3
1946 víkja sér við 'turn around'	[...] svo þegar komnir voru tíu manns, [...] og settir í kringum borðið, then when come were ten people and sat in around table.DEF varð varla vikið sér við fyrir þrengslum. became hardly turned REFL.DAT around for lack.of.space 'then, when ten people had arrived, and were sat around the table, there was hardly any turning around due to lack of space' <i>Þjóðviljinn</i> 144, 29 June 1946, p. 5
1946 hneigja sig 'bow'	En þá var hneigt sig og brosað og beðist afsökunnar. but then was bowed REFL.ACC and smiled and asked forgiveness 'But then there was bowing and smiling and apologizing' <i>Morgunblaðið</i> , 6 September 1946, p. 15
1946 gamna sér 'have fun'	Var þá oft gasprað saman og gamnað sér í kátum drengjaflokki. was then often babbled together and amused REFL.DAT in merry boys'.group 'Then, there was often babbling and having fun in a merry group of boys' <i>Dagur</i> 39, 8 September 1954, p. 4
1959 ræskja sig 'clear one's throat'	Strax þegar sýningin hófst var ræskt sig og hóstað [...] right.away when show.DEF started was cleared.throat REFL.ACC and coughed 'As soon as the show started there was clearing of one's throat and coughing' <i>Tíminn</i> 228, 22 October 1959, p. 4
1960 ugga að sér 'whatch out'	[...] svo æskan skilji að alvara er á ferðum ef ekki er so young.DEF understand that seriousness is on journeys if not is uggað að sér. watched to REFL.DAT 'so that the young understand that it is a serious matter if there is no watching out' <i>Þjóðviljinn</i> 10, 14 January 1960, p. 7
1961 orna sér 'warm oneself'	Þar var ornað sér við bóklestur að gömlum og góðum sið [...] there was warmed REFL.DAT with book.reading to old and good custom 'There, there was warming oneself reading books according to a good old custom' <i>Tíminn</i> 273, 25 October 1961, p. 13

1966 fá sér 'get oneself'	Þegar þessu var lokið var fengið sér kaffi [...] when this was finished was got REFL.DAT coffee.NOM/ACC 'After that, there was having oneself coffee' <i>Þjóðviljinn, Sjómannadagur II. blað, 15 May 1966, p. 6</i>
1966 skella sér 'throw oneself into'	[...] og ekki beðið boðanna heldur skellt sér upp í risastóra and not waited orders.DEF but thrown REFL.DAT up in giant þotu [...] jet 'and there was no waiting but jumping on board of a giant jet' <i>Lesbók Morgunblaðsins 45, 24 December 1966, p.42</i>
1967 þræla sér út 'slave'	Þarna var þrælað sér út við þetta [...] there was slaved REFL.DAT out with this 'There, there was working like a slave on this' <i>Sjómannablaðið Víkingur 7–8, 1 August 1967, p. 206</i>
1981 troða í sig 'stuff oneself'	Var svo mikið troðið í sig að fullorðnir gátu varla staðið upp [...] was so much stuffed in REFL.ACC that adults could hardly stand up 'There was so much stuffing oneself that the adults could hardly stand up' <i>Dagblaðið 160, 20 July 1981, p. 6</i>
1984 slafra í sig 'gobble up'	Nú var slafrað í sig tyrknesku kaffi [...] now was slopped up REFL.ACC Turkish.DAT coffee 'Now there was slopping up of Turkish coffee' <i>Lesbók Morgunblaðsins 1, 7 January 1984, p. 4</i>
1984 úða í sig 'gobble up'	Síðan er sest niður með diskana á hnjúnum og úðað í sig then is sit down with plates.DEF on knees.DEF and gobbled in REFL.ACC þangað til maður stendur á gati [...] until to one stands on hole 'Then there is sitting down with the plates on the knees and stuffing oneself until one explodes' <i>Þjóðviljinn 87–88, 14 April 1984, p. 24</i>
1984 bukka sig 'bow'	Hann fór með mig inn á ótal júdóklúbba, þar sem var bukkað he went with me in on countless judo.clubs where that was bowed sig og beygt fyrir okkur – honum, vildi ég sagt hafa [...] REFL.ACC and bended for us him would I said have 'He took me to countless judo clubs where there was bowing in our honor – or rather his honor, I mean' <i>Helgarpósturinn, 4 October 1984, p. 13</i>

1989 gæða sér 'treat oneself'	Nú var gætt sér á matnum og skálað í vatni og pepsíkóla now was treated REFL.DAT on food.DEF and toasted in water and Pepsi.Cola með sítrónu og klaka. with lemon and ice 'Now there was treating oneself to the food and toasting in water and Pepsi Cola with lemon and ice' <i>Morgunblaðið</i> 204, 9 September. 1989, p. 26
1993 ylja sér 'warm oneself'	Á þeim stundum var yljað sér við ljúfar veigar [...] on that moments was warmed REFL.DAT with sweet beverages 'On these moments there was warming oneself with sweet beverages' <i>Morgunblaðið</i> 17, 22 January 1993, p. 34
1997 drífa sig	Það var drifið sig á lappir og snæddur morgunverður [...] it was hurried REFL.ACC on legs and eaten breakfast 'There was hurrying to get out of bed and breakfast was eaten' <i>Morgunblaðið</i> , 16 March 1997, p. B 16
2004 æfa sig 'practice'	Einnig var æft sig í golfi á túninu heima hjá Bróa [...] also was practiced REFL.ACC in golf on field.DEF home at B. 'Also there was practicing of playing golf in the field at Brói's house' <i>Morgunblaðið</i> 325, 28 November. 2004, p. 36
2004 fleygja sér 'throw oneself'	Á laugardag var fleygt sér í geðveikina í Kringlunni. on Saturday was thrown REFL.DAT in madness.DEF in Kringlan 'On Saturday, there was throwing oneself into the madness in Kringlan' <i>Morgunblaðið</i> , 19 December. 2004, p. 4
2006 íþyngja sér 'burden oneself'	Þá var ekkert verið að íþyngja sér um of með nesti [...] then was nothing been to burden REFL.DAT about too with provisions 'Then there was not too much burdening oneself with provisions' <i>Morgunblaðið</i> 114, 28 April 2006, p. 49