

# EXCEPTIONAL CASE MARKING IN ENGLISH, FAROESE, DANISH, AND ICELANDIC

Linguistics Beyond the Basics: CoSy Exam



SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE

AARHUS UNIVERSITY

MIND THE STRUCTURE  
25 FEBRUARY 2025

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# WHY DID I CHOOSE THIS SUBJECT?

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- Faroese = Case is fun
- Exceptional case marking
- Normal in English and Icelandic, occurs in Danish, what about Faroese?



# STRUCTURE

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## 1. The English case system

- Normal case-marking
- Exceptional case-marking
- ECM vs Object constructions
- ECM verbs
  - 3 approaches to 4 different verb classes

## 2. Other Germanic languages

- Danish
- Icelandic

## 3. Faroese

- ECM?
- Dative in ECM

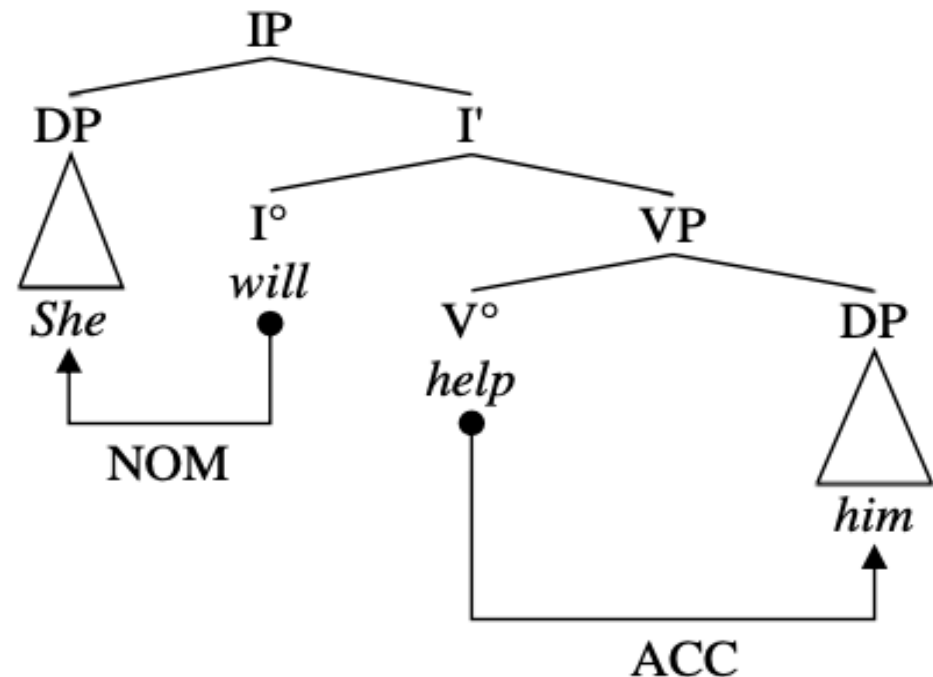


# THE ENGLISH CASE SYSTEM

- Nominative case – finite inflection in I° (subject)
- Accusative case – V°, P°, C° (object)
- Abstract case – case is not morphologically visible on full DPs
  - (1) Anna saw Mary
  - (2) Mary saw Anna
  - (3) She saw her

Case filter: All overt DPs must be assigned case

(Haegemann and Gueron 1999, 128-9)



# EXCEPTIONAL CASE MARKING

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- Exceptional case marking is when the matrix verb “assigns accusative Case not only to its object (...), but also to the subject of the infinitival complement” (Chomsky 2015, 102)
- Exceptional because case is assigned from outside the clause.
  - (4) He is happy
  - (5) I expect [him to be happy]
  - (6) I expected [[him] to leave]
  - (7) I persuaded [him<sub>1</sub>] [PRO<sub>1</sub> to leave]

ECM ≠ object constructions

(Vikner 2014, 183-7)



# EXCEPTIONAL CASE MARKING

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- ECM verbs

- Believe-class verbs (epistemic)
- Want-class verbs (volitional)
- Perception verbs

- Non ECM

- Try-class verbs

(8) I believe [her to be a good person]

(9) \*I believe [PRO to be a good person]

(10) I want [her to be a good person]

(11) I want [PRO to be a good person]

(12) I see [her be a good person]

(13) \*I see [PRO to be a good person]

(14) \*I try [her to be a good person]

(15) I try [PRO to be a good person]

Case theory vs binding theory

(Bošković 1996, 272-80), (Castillo 2001, 117-128), (Chomsky 2015, 102)



# DANISH

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- Two cases: nominative and oblique
- Abstract case
- ECM is rare
- Believe class verbs – not ECM
- Want class verbs – not ECM
- Perception verbs – *do* allow ECM

(16) \*Jeg tror hende (at) være et godt menneske

I believe her to be a good person

(17) Jeg så hende være et godt menneske

I saw her be a good person

(Vikner 2014, 179) (Jensen 2023, 182-184)



# ICELANDIC

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- ECM is allowed
- 3 types of “Accusative with infinitive” (Thráinsson 2007, 436-7)
  1. Epistemic (telja – believe)
  2. Causative (láta – let)
  3. Sensory (sjá – see)
- Structural vs lexical case
- Lexical case is preserved under ECM, structural is not

(Thráinsson 2007, 2 + 181-2 + 436-7)

(18) Þeir hafa sofið.

They (N) have slept

(19) Við teljum [þá hafa sofið].

We believe [them (A) have slept ]

(20) Þeim hefur leiðst.

Them (D) have been bored

(21) Við teljum [þeim hafa leiðst].

We believe [them (D) have bored]



# FAROESE

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- Case-rich – morphology is similar to Icelandic
- ECM is allowed – same verb-classes as Icelandic
  1. Epistemic (halda – believe)
  2. Causative (lata – let)
  3. Sensory (siggja – see)
- BUT... isn't ECM weird in Faroese? – I conducted a survey

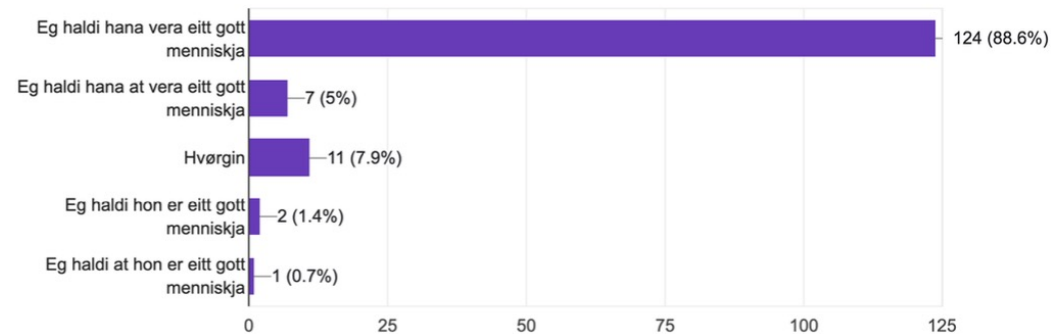
(Lockwood 1977, 102-3) (Thráinsson et al. 2012, 252-3+312)



# SURVEY ABOUT ECM IN FAROESE

Hvør setningur ljóðar rættur? (tú kanst velja fleiri)

140 responses



Question: Which sentence sounds correct? (You can pick more than one)

1: I consider her be a good person (88,6%)

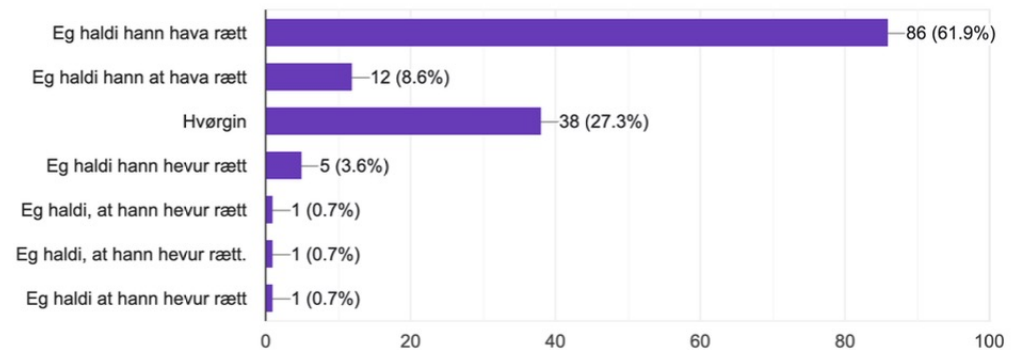
2: I consider her to be a good person (5%)

3. Neither (7,9%)

Other answers: "I think she is a good person" (1,4%), "I think that she is a good person" (0,7%)

Hvør setningur ljóðar rættur? (tú kanst velja fleiri)

139 responses



Question: Which sentence sounds correct? (You can pick more than one)

1: I believe him be/have right (61,9%)

2: I believe him to be/have right (8,6%)

3. Neither (27,3%)

Other answers: "I believe he is right" (3,6%), "I believe that he is right" (2,1%)



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# DATIVE IN ECM

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- Lexical and structural case in Faroese ECM
- Is the lexically assigned dative preserved under ECM?
- Barnes and Thráinsson disagree
- And the survey disagrees with both...
- Barnes argues that lexical dative case is not preserved (ever)

(22) Jógvani tørvaði ein nýggjan bil.

Jógvan (D) needed a new car.

(23) Eg helt Jógvan tørva ein nýggjan bil.

I believed Jógvan (A) need a new car.

Barnes (2001, 114)



# DATIVE IN ECM

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- Thráinsson (2007, 67) argues that when verbs only allow a dative subject, the dative is preserved under ECM and the accusative ruled out.  
(24) Hann heldur mér/\*meg standast við orðalagslæru  
He believes me (D/\*A) be nauseated by syntax.
- Our survey showed: **only 9,4% agreed with him**, 45,7% prefer the accusative, 43,5% said neither.
- Also... When the verb allows both dative and nominative subjects, both accusative and dative are allowed in ECM constructions – but the accusative is preferred.
- Jónsson (2009, 147) – 63,4% preferred accusative and 41,5% preferred dative as embedded subject to *mangla* (need)

# CONCLUSION

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- ECM occurs with epistemic, sensory and volitional verbs in English
- English, Icelandic and Faroese all share the feature of permitting ECM constructions as complements of verbs in the believe class and perception verbs
- Danish prefers finite complements, but allows ECM with perception verbs
- In Faroese finite complements are preferred, but still ECM used
  - a tendency that, along with the gradual loss of dative case suggests that Faroese shares more linguistic features with Danish than Icelandic does
- English is simpler in case in some respects, but shares fundamental features of ECM with the case-rich Icelandic and Faroese.
- While attitudes and usage of ECM vary in English, Faroese and Icelandic, the constructions remain grammatical in all of them, highlighting shared core syntactic features despite morphosyntactic differences.



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