

## *Góður þessi bjór* ‘Good this beer’

A change without a change

The assumption that no two speakers need to share the exact same I-language suggests that two individuals producing the same output may not necessarily have the same underlying structure for that output. In this paper, I focus on utterances such as those in (1) and propose that a change in underlying structure has taken place without a change in the output form. On my analysis, the examples in (1) are complete sentences in Modern Icelandic where the demonstrative *þessi* ‘this’ is perceived to occupy a verbal position. Historically, however, they are derived from structures with an overt copula.

- (1) a. *Góður þessi bjór!*                      b. *Hálfviti þessi maður!*  
good      this      beer                      idiot      this      man  
‘This beer (is) good!’                      ‘This man (is) an idiot.’

In Modern Icelandic, sentences such as those in (1) are common in spoken language when speakers express their opinion on a variety of things. These types of constructions lack the copula *vera* ‘to be’ which is otherwise well attested in Icelandic. Compare for instance the sentence in (2) where *vera* appears between the DP *þessi kaka* ‘this cake’ and the adjective *góð* ‘good’.

- (2) *Þessi kaka er góð.*  
this      cake      is      good  
‘This cake is good.’

If the copula *vera* is added to the sentences in (1) the result is somewhat odd and hence the bracketed question marks in (3). Although such sentences are strictly speaking not ungrammatical, they are not of the same nature as those in (1). Instead of being a part of every-day language, speakers that were consulted consider them as poetic, archaic or being extremely formal in nature.

- (3) (?) *Góður er þessi bjór!*  
good      is      this      beer

Despite not being a part of every-day Modern Icelandic, the structure in (3) is derivable via topicalization of the adjective *góður* ‘good’ and movement of the finite verb into second position. Making use of a simplified clausal structure, the positions can be assumed to be SpecCP and the C head respectively. Sentences such as those in (1) were originally derived in the same way, except the copula was left unpronounced. At some point in history, however, speakers started hypothesizing a different derivation for (1). Instead of including an unpronounced copula *vera* ‘to be’, the demonstrative *þessi* ‘this’ was reanalyzed as occupying the verb position in C after topicalization of the adjective or the noun. This results in two slightly different grammars producing the same output form (Figure 1).

Four questions may be raised immediately with respect to the output form and the hypothesized new grammar. The first relates to whether the output form might not be considered a fossilized construction in the modern language. Upon scrutinization, this cannot be maintained since the structure is quite flexible, allowing for the topicalized constituent to be modified with adjectives or adverbs, depending on which is appropriate. Furthermore, predication can take place over any topic or thing. The only restrictions are that the topicalized

constituent must be either an adjective or a noun that imposes the speaker’s evaluation on what is being talked about.

<b>Grammar I</b>	[CP [AP <i>frábær</i> ] [C' [C $\text{œr}$ ] [TP [DP <i>þessi bjór</i> ] [T' [T] .....]]]
<b>Grammar II</b>	[CP [AP <i>frábær</i> ] [C' [C <i>þessi</i> ] [TP [DP <i>bjór</i> ] [T' [T] .....]]]
<b>Output form</b>	<i>Frábær            þessi    bjór!</i> excellent            this      beer

Figure 1. Structure after movement in two grammars along with output form.

Second, if the derivation of the surface form includes elision of the copula *vera* ‘to be’, it should be possible to add it back to the surface form without any radical changes in the usage or function of the sentence. As mentioned above, this is not the case and the result is a somewhat odd structure that does not quite belong in every-day language (3). One might ask what status these have since they are not completely ungrammatical. Adopting the idea of Theoretical Bilingualism and multiple grammars (Roeper 1999, Aboh 2015), it can be argued that while (1) is a part of speakers’ everyday language (3) belongs to a different grammar that is associated with more specific usage; poetic, formal and archaic.

Third, if the demonstrative *þessi* is reanalyzed as having a verbal function one might wonder whether this was some bizarre or unexpected change within a theory of grammar or theory of change. In this respect it is worth pointing out that a change from a demonstrative to a copula is by no means unknown. Heine and Kuteva (2002:108-109, 235) note that this type of change has been observed in for instance Egyptian, Tamazight, Shilha and various Tibeto-Burma languages. Lohndal (2009) argues that a change like this involves a reanalysis from a specifier of a phrase to the head of the same phrase (cf. van Gelderen 2004) and changes from interpretable to uninterpretable features. This might be assumed for Icelandic as well.

Finally, given that Modern Icelandic already has a fully-fledged copula *vera*, would it not be odd for a new copula element to emerge? Here it must be noted that provided *þessi* functions as a copula, it is in a complementary distribution with *vera*; it has a very specific usage, only occurring in utterances such as those in (1). The copula *vera*, on the other hand, occurs elsewhere resulting in the two elements not being in direct competition (in the sense of Kroch 1989, 1994). Additionally, several factors may contribute to a reanalysis of *þessi* as a verbal element. In accordance with Lightfoot’s (1979) Transparency Principle or Roberts and Roussou’s (2003) principle where learners opt for the “simplest” structure possible for parsing data, it can be argued that learners presented with a structure like that in (1) prefer to assume that all elements of the structure are present in the utterance instead of hypothesizing about an elided copula verb. It might even be suggested that the position of the finite verb in Icelandic plays a role. Icelandic is a verb second (V2) language (for an overview see Thráinsson 2007) and learners may expect finite verbs in the second position. Given the architecture of grammar, the possibility of spec-to-head reanalysis and the linear order in utterances like those in (1), the demonstrative *þessi* could plausibly be reanalyzed as a verbal element in structures of this type.

To conclude, I have argued that although utterances such as those in (1) may historically be derived from structures such as in (3), they are of a different kind in the modern language. On my analysis the examples in (1) do not involve an elided verb but are instead complete sentences where the demonstrative *þessi* ‘this’ is perceived to occupy a verbal position. The reason for the reanalysis stem from many factors, including the V2 characteristics of Icelandic and a general assumption about learner’s parsing strategies.