

Og að mér lifanda lifir enn hans hamingja

Rare syntactic phenomena in parsed historical corpora

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Introduction

- This study examines the historical distribution of the Prepositional Absolute Construction (PAC), a rare and underdescribed syntactic construction in Icelandic.
- We provide a detailed analysis of the internal structure of PAC and its development through time.
- We demonstrate how a syntactically annotated digital corpus of historical texts can be used to describe uncommon syntactic phenomena across different stages of a language.

The Prepositional Absolute Construction (PAC)

We have defined PAC as a small clause containing a subject NP and a present or past participle whose case is governed by the preposition *að* 'at' (Eypórsson and Indriðadóttir 2018). The construction consists of three types, labeled Type 1 (1a), Type 2a (1b) and Type 2b (1c).

- (1)
- [að öllum sjáandi]
at all.dat seeing
'While everybody sees/saw.'
 - [að viku liðinni]
at week.dat passed.dat
'When the week had passed.'
 - [að athuguðu máli]
at considered.dat matter.dat
'When the matter had been considered.'

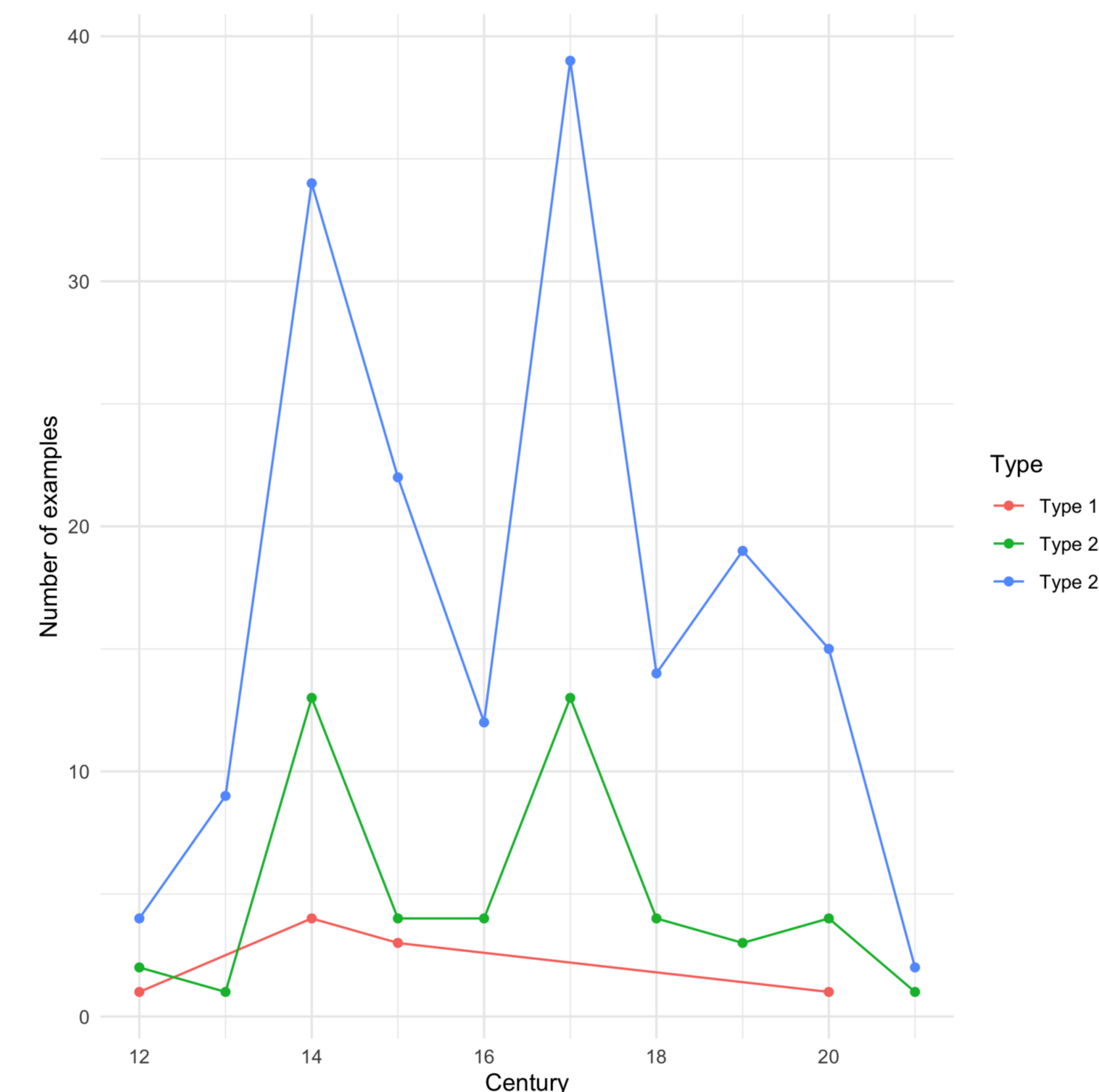
- In Type 1 (1a), the verb is in the present participle, the subject is in an active clause with a finite verb. In Type 2a (1b), the verb is in the past participle, the subject is in an active clause with a finite verb. In Type 2b (1c), the verb is in the past participle, the subject is in a passive clause with a finite verb (underlying object). The past participle shows agreement with the NP in case, number and gender in both Old and Modern Icelandic.
- The grammatical function of the NP in PAC is either that of a subject of a finite active clause (Type 1 and Type 2a) or a subject of a finite passive clause, i.e. an "underlying" object (Type 2b).
- Due to their correspondence to subjects in finite clauses, in this paper we call the NPs in PAC "subjects", as has been argued by Indriðadóttir and Eypórsson (to appear).

PAC in IcePaHC

- Our study is based on the Icelandic Parsed Historical Corpus (IcePaHC) (Wallenberg et al. 2011), a free and open source resource available under a GPL-style license for download and online on treebankstudio.org
- IcePaHC is a 1 million word historical corpus, parsed syntactically for full phrase structure and hand-corrected.
- We searched for all possible types of PAC with a single search command and extracted a total of 243 results.
- The results were then analyzed in R (2021), where the distribution of PAC from the 12th to the 21st century was defined, based on the three types described in (1).
- We then describe the results in detail, considering issues such as the grammatical function of the NP and the participle and the word order patterns within the construction.

Distribution of PAC across the ages

- 238 results were extracted: we defined the distribution of PAC from the 12th to the 21st century, based on the three types described in (1).
- Previous studies have suggested that the distribution of the present and past participles is different in Old and Modern Icelandic, i.e. that there are very few occurrences of Type 1 in Modern Icelandic, whereas Type 2 is relatively common, in particular Type 2b (Eypórsson and Indriðadóttir 2018).
- Our results show that the distribution pattern of present and past participles in PAC has been consistent throughout all stages of the language from the 12th century to Modern Icelandic.



The vast majority of examples were of Type 2b (3a), while considerably fewer examples were found of Type 2a (3b), and only a few examples were found of Type 1 (3c). Most examples of Types 2a and 2b date from the 14th and 17th centuries.

- (2)
- En [að sénu þessu mikla tákni] lofuðu allir guð og sæla Maríu
but at seen.dat this.dat great.dat sign.dat praised all god and blessed Mary Magdalenu.
Magdalen
'But having seen this great sign everybody praised God and the blessed Mary Magdalen.' (ID 1350.MARTA.REL-SAG.,914)
 - [en að morgni komnum] þá stóð Jesús í sjávarfjörinni.
but at morning.dat come.dat then stood Jesus in seashore
'but when morning came Jesus was standing on the seashore.'
(ID 1540.NTJOHN.REL-BIB,232.1631)
 - Og [að mér lifanda] lifir enn hans hamingja.
and at me.dat living.dat lives still his happiness
'And while I am living his happiness still lives.' (ID 1300.ALEXANDER.NAR-SAG.,554)

This is important as it means that while PAC has always been a rare construction in the Icelandic language, it has maintained a similar level of use and productivity.

Internal structure of PAC

- Our search extracted examples that contain the preposition *d* 'on' rather than the usual *að* (3).
- (3) Anno 1661-1661 [á liðnum töðuslætti] brann allur bærinn á Gröf á
year 1661-1661 on passed.dat haymaking.dat burned all the-farm on Gröf on
Höfðaströnd.
Höfðaströnd
'In the year 1661, after haymaking, the whole farm on Gröf on Höfðaströnd burned.'
(ID 1725.BISKUPASOGUR.NAR-REL.,943)

- This is interesting on its own as examples of PAC with other prepositions than *að* have not been discovered before.
 - It has also been maintained that case marking within PAC developed very early on, as both dative and accusative NPs are attested in the PAC in Old Icelandic, whereas in Modern Icelandic only dative NPs seem to be found (Eypórsson and Indriðadóttir 2018).
 - Our search revealed much newer examples of PAC with an accusative NP.
- (4)
- Og [eftir máltíð gerða] var hann kallaður að fylgja einu líki sem verið hafði
and after meal.acc done.acc was he called to follow one corpse that been had
kaupmaður til sinnar greftrunar.
merchant to his burial
'And after the meal he was summoned to a funeral procession to the burial of someone who had been a merchant.' (ID 1628.OLAFUREGILS.BIO-TRA.,769)
 - Þrællinn kvað honum illa farið að eggja sig til stórræða en svíkja sig [á svo
the-slave said him badly gone to incite him to big-venture but betray him on so
gert ofan].
done.acc down
'The slave said that he had fared badly by inciting him to a big venture and thereupon betraying him.' (ID 1830.HELLISMENN.NAR-SAG.,220)

- While the overt NP *töðuslætti* 'haymaking' in (4a) is in the dative case, the missing NP in (4b) is in the accusative, as shown by the form of the participle *gert* 'done'.
- These results are important as this means that accusative NPs in PAC survived in Icelandic until the 19th century, many centuries longer than has previously been considered.

Conclusion

- While PAC has always been a rare construction in the Icelandic language, it has maintained a similar level of use and productivity across different stages of Icelandic.
- The distribution pattern of present and past participles in PAC has been consistent throughout all stages of the language from the 12th century to Modern Icelandic.
- Examples with the preposition *d* 'on' have never been found before.
- Accusative NPs in PAC survived in Icelandic until the 19th century, many centuries longer than has previously been considered
- Our study shows how a syntactically annotated digital corpus of historical texts can be used to describe the preservation and development of uncommon syntactic phenomena across different stages of a language.