

GSAS Indo-European Workshop

Friday, April 27th, at 5 pm in Boylston Hall Room 335

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Arguments in a cold climate: Stability and change in Icelandic weather verbs

The standard view on weather verbs in Modern Icelandic is that they are “no-argument predicates” (e.g. Thráinsson 2007). This was essentially also the view of earlier scholarship on Old and Modern Icelandic (Nygaard 1905). In this paper I argue against the standard view and show that weather verbs in Modern Icelandic in fact do have arguments, both (overt and covert) quasi-arguments (i.e. non-referential arguments, Chomsky 1981, Rizzi 2000) and overt NPs, occurring in the nominative, accusative or dative case. It can be demonstrated that both the nominative and the oblique NPs are syntactic subjects. I conclude that even though some surface changes have occurred, notably the emergence of “expletives”, weather verbs and their arguments have remained stable throughout the history of Icelandic.