

## PREPOSITION DOUBLING IN ICELANDIC

### JÓHANNES G. JÓNSSON

It is well-known that Icelandic, like many other Germanic languages, allows preposition stranding under A-bar-movement (Maling & Zaenen 1985). What is not known from the literature is that Icelandic also allows preposition doubling under A-bar-movement, yielding triplets like (1):

- (1) a. **Um** hvað eruð þið að tala?  
about what are you talking  
b. Hvað eruð þið að tala **um**?  
what are you talking about  
c. **Um** hvað eruð þið að tala **um**?  
about what are you talking about

The syntactic properties of preposition doubling in Icelandic are relatively straightforward. As shown in (2), preposition doubling is only possible when both Piped Piping and preposition stranding are possible:

- (2) a. **Með** hvaða rökum var þessu hafnað?  
with what arguments was this rejected  
b. \*Hvaða rökum var þessu hafnað **með**?  
which arguments was this rejected with  
c. \***Með** hvaða rökum var þessu hafnað **með**?  
with which arguments was this rejected with

Since Pied Piping is always available when P-stranding is available in Icelandic, P-doubling and P-stranding have very much the same syntactic distribution. This can be shown not only for main clause questions but also for topicalizations, clefts, embedded questions etc. Moreover, P-doubling seems to be perfectly general in the sense that it applies to more or less all prepositions in Icelandic.

Examples of P-doubling are often considered “performance errors” but this view is clearly mistaken. This is shown e.g. by the fact that examples of P-doubling in Icelandic are judged to be fully acceptable by native speakers. It is also noteworthy that P-doubling is found in many languages. Modern English has P-doubling in relative clauses that contain the wh-word *which* (e.g. *special rates for which the working American is paying for*; see Riley & Parker 1986) and P-doubling is also found in Swedish (Delsing 2003), Middle English (Bergh 1998) and Norwegian (Kristine Bentzen p.c.). There are even cases of P-doubling within the VP-area in Old Icelandic (cf. Nygaard 1906:22,355,384), possibly due to the mixed VO-OV properties of Old Icelandic.

Due to the lack of dialects in Iceland, there is no sense in which P-doubling is associated with “non-standard” varieties. However, P-doubling is clearly a trait of spoken or informal language. In that respect, it is very similar to other doubling phenomena in Icelandic, e.g. double adverbs in the scope of negation (*Ég hef ekki lengur neinn áhuga á þessu lengur* ‘I have no longer any interest in this longer’), double complementizers with *að* ‘that’ (*Hann kemur ef að ég bið hann* ‘He comes it that I ask him’) and right dislocation (*Hann er ekki ánægður með þetta, hann Jón* ‘He is not happy with this, he John’). In general, it seems that informal registers of Icelandic use more “functional material” than formal registers to convey the same meaning. This can be seen not only in doubling phenomena but also in the use of the expletive pronoun *það* ‘there’ (which is strongly avoided in formal texts) and the use of

prepositions (e.g. *Ég beið Jóns* ‘I waited (for) John’ is clearly more formal than *Ég beið eftir Jóni* ‘I waited for John’).

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Bergh, Gunnar. 1998. Double prepositions in English. In Fisiak, Jacek & Marcin Krygier (eds.): *Advances in English Historical Linguistics*, pp. 1-13. Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin/New York.
- Delsing, Lars-Olof. 2003. Preposition stranding and case. In Lars-Olof Delsing et.al. (eds.): *Grammatik i fokus: festskrift till Christer Platzack den 18 november 2003*, pp. 75-84. Institutionen för nordiska språk, Lunds universitet.
- Maling, Joan & Annie Zaenen. 1985. Preposition-Stranding and Passive. *Nordic Journal of Linguistics* 8:197-209.
- Nygaard, Marius. 1906. *Norrøn syntax*. H. Aschehoug & Co., Oslo.
- Riley, Kathryn & Frank Parker. 1986. Anomalous Prepositions in Relative Clauses. *American Speech* 61:291-306.