

On Stylistic Fronting

Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson

Lund University

This is a handout of a talk given in Tübingen 2010, updated in July 2013.¹ What is updated is above all the results of the Google search. The reported numbers are not the ones you get immediately by using Google search (yielding a huge number of irrelevant hits) but the ones you get if you go to the last page containing the search string (within quotation marks). So, for the string “*sem hafa verið*” ‘who/that have been’ you get the overall number 21.100.000 (July 14, 2013), but the number you get by going to the last page containing this string is mere 221 (fluctuating slightly from day to day).² The latter number is the one reported here. It is the number of pages containing the string, not necessarily the number of examples.

Caveat: On some of the problems with using Google as the base for statistics in linguistics, see Kilgarriff (2007).

1. Introduction

Some landmarks:

Maling 1980, Rögnvaldsson & Thráinsson 1990, Jónsson 1991, Falk 1993, Kosmejer 1993, Holmberg & Platzack 1995, Holmberg 2000, Holmberg 2005, Hrafnbjargarson 2004, Tháinsson 2007, Ott 2009, Franco 2010, Angantýsson 2011, Wood 2011.

Holmberg (2000:445):

... stylistic fronting is an operation that moves a category, often but not always a single word, to what looks like the subject position in finite clauses where that position is empty, namely, in subject relatives, embedded subject questions, complement clauses with an extracted subject, and various impersonal constructions.

¹ Max Planck Institute, Tübingen, March 26–27: “Focus, Contrast and Givenness in Interaction with Extraction and Deletion”, organized by Valéria Mólnar, Susanne Winkler, and Jutta Hartmann. Many thanks to them and to the other workshop participants.

² The corresponding numbers on July 31 2013 were 20.300.000 and 224.

Typical traits:

- (1) a. The fronted element: SF fronts a non-subject, usually a “small” category (typically a single word)
- b. Locality restriction: SF usually fronts the structurally “closest” candidate
- c. Domain(s):
 - a. SF applies in finite clauses only
 - b. SF is strictly clause-bounded
 - c. SF is common in subordinate clauses
- d. Precondition: SF is preconditioned by a “subject gap”³
- e. Landing site: SF seemingly moves the fronted category into the “subject gap”

Typical examples:

- (2) a. Eins og þeir vita [sem **lesið**_i hafa bókina **t_i**] þá ...
as they know who read have book.the then ...
'As they who have read the book know, then ...'

gthg.blog.is/blog/gthg/entry/202600/ – March 8, 2010
- b. ... ég fór aftur til læknis [eins og **um**_i var talað **t_i**] og ...
... I went again to doctor as about was talked and ...
'(Anyway) I went to see the doctor again, as had been agreed upon, and ...'

blogs.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view...blogId – March 8, 2010
- c. **Sagt**_i er **t_i** [að fegurðin komi að innan ...]
said is that beauty.the comes from inside
'It is said that the beauty comes from the inside ...'

asarut.blogcentral.is/ – March 8, 2010

Topicalization, in contrast (cf. Maling 1980):

- (3) a. It usually fronts maximal categories
- b. It is not obviously restricted by locality
- c. It is not clause-bounded (i.e., extraction by topicalization is possible)
- d. It is common in main clauses, much less common in subordinate clauses
- e. It is not preconditioned by a “subject gap”

Many questions remain unanswered:

- How common is it?

³ But see Hrafnbjargarson 2004 for a different understanding.

- What are the “favorite contexts” (stylistically, genres, ...)?
- Is it bookish, old fashioned, marked, ...?
- Is it ever obligatory?
- Why does it happen - what does it “do”? – EPP? Focus? Stylistic effects?
- What “happens” when it does not happen?

2. Two different SF contexts

Holmberg: SF is **EPP-driven**, that is (2000:446):

I will argue that SF is movement of a category to “subject position,” that is, [Spec, IP]. In essence, the claim is that the element moved by SF functions as a pure expletive in its derived position. As shown ..., it alternates with the special expletive *það* in some cases. The trigger of the movement is a version of the Extended Projection Principle (EPP)

“ ... a pure **expletive**, ... alternates with ... *það* in **some** cases, ... trigger is a version of ... **EPP**”

There are basically **two different** SF contexts (showing that SF and insertion of expletive *það* ‘there, it’ are subject to different conditions).

- | | | | |
|----|--|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| A. | Clauses with a subject trace
(i.e., clauses relativized/extracted from) | <u>ok</u> <u>ok</u> SF | * <i>það</i> ⁴ |
| B. | Clauses with a non-trace subject gap
B1. Subjectless impersonal clauses
B2. Clauses with a “late” subject | <u>ok/??</u> <u>ok</u> SF | ^{ok} <i>það</i> |

[The underline indicates a “gap” (non-application of SF and *það*-insertion) and ^{ok/??} indicates variable acceptance, depending on a variety of contextual factors and on speakers.]

A. Clauses with a subject trace:

- (4) a. ... fyndnasta bók [sem ___ hefur verið skrifuð].
 funniest book that has been written

⁴ This is a slight simplification. *það*-insertion is more sharply ungrammatical when the extracted/relativized argument is a subject than when it is a non-subject.

‘... the funniest book that has (ever) been written.’

www.123.is/thorkell/blog/month/200711/ – March 11, 2010

b. ... fyndnasta bók [sem **skrifuð**_i hefur verið **t_i**].

‘... the funniest book that has (ever) been written.’

www.thjodmal.is/index.php/page/30.html – March 9, 2010

c. * ... fyndnasta bók [sem **það** hefur verið skrifuð].
funniest book that there has been written

B. Clauses with a non-trace subject gap

B1. Subjectless impersonal clauses:

(5) a. ... þegar ___ verður komið í ...
... when will_be come into
‘... when I/we/they will get into ...’

sigurjonn.blog.is/blog/sigurjonn/?offset=10 – March 11, 2010

b. ... þegar **komið**_i verður **t_i** heim ...
when come will_be home
‘... when I/we/they will get (back) home ...’

poppycock.blogg.is/blogg/page2 – March 9, 2010

c. ... þegar **það** verður komið heim ...
... when there will_be come home
‘... when I/we/they will get (back) home ...’

face-753231.blogcentral.is/blog/2006/11/3/selfoosss%5D-and-more-o/ – March 9, 2010

B2. Clauses with a late subject:

(6) a. ... þegar ___ verða komnir **þjórækjar** við nammibarinn á ...
... when will_be come.PL beer_coolers at candybar.the at
‘... when beer coolers will have been introduced at the candybar at ...’

hross.blog.is/blog/hross/entry/343764/ – March 11, 2010

b. ... þegar **komnir**_i verða **t_i** **hvolpar** ...
when come.PL will_be.3PL puppies
‘... when puppies will have arrived/come into being ...’

nott1606.blogg.is/blogg/444501 – March 9, 2010

c. ... þegar **það** verða komnir **hvolpar** ...
when there will_be.3PL come.PL puppies
‘... when puppies will have arrived/come into being ...’

leirdals.123.is/blog/record/355845/ – March 9, 2010

3. Clauses with a subject trace ("personal clauses")

– SF competes with V1, **not** with *það*

				<i>Halldor Sigurðsson's intuitions</i>	<i>Google 14/7 2013</i>
					# of pages
(7)	a.	^{ok} sem	___ hafa verið ...		221
			that have.3PL been		
	b.	^{ok} sem	verið_i hafa <i>t_i</i> ...		221
			that been have		
(8)	a.	^{ok} sem	___ hafa farið ...		250
			that have gone		
	b.	^{ok} sem	farið_i hafa <i>t_i</i> ...		252
			that gone have		
(9)	a.	^{ok} sem	___ hafa lesið ...		153
			that have read		
	b.	^{ok} sem	lesið_i hafa <i>t_i</i> ...		80
			that read have		
(10)	a.	^{ok} sem	___ hafa búið þar ...		23
			that have lived there		
	b.	[?] sem	búið_i hafa <i>t_i</i> þar ...		11
			that lived have there		
	c.	^{ok} sem	þar_i hafa búið <i>t_i...</i>		29
			that there have lived		
(11)	a.	^{ok} sem	___ hafa búið í Danmörku ...		6
			that have lived in Denmark		
	b.	^(?) sem	búið hafa <i>t</i> í Danmörku ...		16
			that lived have in Denmark		
	c.	^{??} sem	í Danmörku hafa búið <i>t...</i>		0 !!
			that in Denmark have lived		

Holmberg 2000:454:

(12) Þeir sem í **Osló** hafa búið *t* ...

Holmberg (2000:449), Hrafnbjargarson (2004:110), Angantýsson (2009):

(13) Þeir sem í **Osló** hafa verið *t* ...
those that in Oslo have been/stayed

Thráinsson (2007:381)

(14) Þeir sem í **Danmörku** hafa verið *t* ...
those that in Denmark have been/stayed

– *but*:

(15) sem í **X** hafa ...
X = New York, London, París, Stokkhólmi, Berlín, Moskvu, Róm, **0** !!
Kaupmannahöfn, Madríd, Lissabon, Aþenu, Peking, Tókýó,
Noregi, Svíþjóð, Japan, Þýskalandi, Frakklandi, Grikklandi

sem í **Osló** hafa ... 3 exs., all citing linguistic papers
sem í **Danmörku** hafa 4 exs., 3 of which cite Thráinsson's example

However, there is no general ban on maximal projections
(but notice: no participle, hence no “plausible competitor”):

	<i>HS intuitions</i>	<i>Google 14/7 2013</i>
(16) a. sem ___ tóku þessa ákvörðun that took.3PL this decision.ACC 'who/that made this decision.'	ok	27
b. sem þessa ákvörðun tóku <i>t</i> ...	ok	11
c. sem þessa erfiðu ákvörðun tóku <i>t</i> ... that this difficult decision took	(?)	0
(17) a. sem ___ komu til landsins that came.3PL to country.the	ok	110
b. sem til landsins komu <i>t</i> ... that to country.the came	ok	22

The “*sem í Osló hafa issue*”. – Seems to be a question of the “**best candidate**”= not only the structurally “closest” one (as under Holmberg’s account) but also the “lightest available” one, informationally and phonologically.

Another interfering factor is the “**minimize risk factor**”: If you don’t have any “really good” candidate, then you better not put your money on any!

Focus or accentuation sometimes matters (Sigurðsson 1997, Hrafnbjargarson 2004), but only secondarily, i.e., when the “best candidate” is not moved. If it were a primary factor one would not expect the “*sem í Osló hafa issue*” to arise (i.e., it should be easier to accentuate a contentful PP than a “content meager” participle like *verið* ‘been’).

The results from an **informant survey** (a part of the IceSynDia project), reported on in Angantýsson 2008, see also Angantýsson 2011 (glosses and translations HS – HS intuition for 18a, b, c = ok, ok, ok):

- (18) a. Hún spurði [hvort **rætt** hefði verið *t* við Helgu].
 she asked whether talked had.SJV been with Helga
 ‘She asked if anybody had talked to Helga.’
- b. Þetta er frumvarp [sem **lagt** hefur verið *t* fram á Alþingi].
 this is bill [that put has.IND been forth at Alþing]
 ‘This is a bill that has been proposed in the Parliament.’
- c. Þetta er eitt af þeim vandamálum [sem **upp** hafa komið *t*].
 this is one of the problems that up have.IND come
 ‘Tis is one of the problems that have occurred/ arisen.’

	The youngest speakers (231 15 year old informants)			The oldest speakers (143 65-70 year old informants)		
	ok	?	*	ok	?	*
18a hvort rætt hefði: whether talked had	60,1%	20,6%	19,3%	87,3%	8,5%	4,2%
18b sem lagt hefur: that put has	67,4%	16,5%	16,1%	94,4%	3,5%	2,1%
18c sem upp hafa: that up have	62,6%	20,9%	16,5%	92,3%	5,6%	2,1%

In comparison, topicalization (HS intuition = *, *)

- (19) a. Ég veit þó ekki [hvort til Rómar hefur hún komið].
I know though not whether to Rome has she come
- b. Þetta er strákurinn [sem í París hitti ég síðast]
this is boy.the who in Paris met I last_time

		The youngest speakers (231 15 year old informants)			The oldest speakers (143 65-70 year old informants)		
		ok	?	*	ok	?	*
19a	hvort til Rómar : whether to Rome	4,8%	11,4%	83,83%	1,4%	8,5%	90,1%
19b	sem í París : who in Paris	6,6%	6,6%	86,9%	0,7%	5,0%	94,3%

Informant remarks about SF in (18) according to Angantýsson 2008: “You sometimes hear older people use it... I could use it in written language”. / “Maybe older or more sophisticated”.

Angantýsson 2009: “SF is ... more common in written language and in a formal style of speech, ... The data from the interviews actually confirms that people consider these constructions formal and ‘sophisticated’.”

Sigurðsson 2010: “SF often has (formal) stylistic flavor to it, but it does not correlate with propositional semantics, ... it generally has vague or even non-detectable semantic effects.”

But consider:

		<i>Indicative:</i>		<i>Google</i>	
				<i>14/7 2013:</i>	
(20)	a.	sem __ er skrifuð. <u>F.SG</u> that is written	/ sem skrifuð er	89	/ 130
	b.	sem __ var skrifuð that was written	/ sem skrifuð var	85	/ 137
	c.	sem __ hefur verið skrifuð that has been written	/ sem skrifuð hefur verið	29	/ 69
	d.	sem __ hafði verið skrifuð that had been written	/ sem skrifuð hafði verið	6	/ 11
(21)	a.	sem __ er skrifað. <u>NT.SG</u>	/ sem skrifað er	129	/ 213
	b.	sem __ var skrifað	/ sem skrifað var	72	/ 175

c.	sem __ hefur verið skrifað	/ sem skrifað hefur verið	47	/ 102
d.	sem __ hafði verið skrifað	/ sem skrifað hafði verið	16	/ 32
(22) a.	sem __ er skrifaður. <u>M.SG</u>	/ sem skrifaður er	47	/ 70
b.	sem __ var skrifaður	/ sem skrifaður var	35	/ 59
c.	sem __ hefur verið skrifaður	/ sem skrifaður hefur verið	17	/ 32
d.	sem __ hafði verið skrifaður	/ sem skrifaður hafði verið	5	/ 2

Subjunctive:

(23) a.	sem __ sé skrifuð. <u>F.SG</u>	/ sem skrifuð sé	6	/ 5
	that is written			
b.	sem __ væri skrifuð	/ sem skrifuð væri	14	/ 14
	that would_be written			
c.	sem __ hafi verið skrifuð	/ sem skrifuð hafi verið	12	/ 10
d.	sem __ hefði verið skrifuð	/ sem skrifuð hefði verið	6	/ 11
(24) a.	sem __ sé skrifað. <u>NT.SG</u>	/ sem skrifað sé	1	/ 14
b.	sem __ væri skrifað	/ sem skrifað væri	13	/ 17
c.	sem __ hafi verið skrifað	/ sem skrifað hafi verið	4	/ 13
d.	sem __ hefði verið skrifað	/ sem skrifað hefði verið	3	/ 13
(25) a.	sem __ sé skrifaður. <u>M.SG</u>	/ sem skrifaður sé	1	/ 5
b.	sem __ væri skrifaður	/ sem skrifaður væri	6	/ 3
c.	sem __ hafi verið skrifaður	/ sem skrifaður hafi verið	2	/ 3
d.	sem __ hefði verið skrifaður	/ sem skrifaður hefði verið	0	/ 1

Phonology (number of syllables, etc.)? But compare e.g. (20c) with the F.PL. in (26):

(26)	sem __ hafa verið skrifaðar	/ sem skrifaðar hafa verið	58	/ 88
	that have been written			

However, for clear indications that SF is sensitive to the phonological “lightness” of the moved constituent, see Wood 2011. Deictic adverbials (*þar* ‘there’, *þá* ‘then’, etc.) seem also to move more “willingly” than non-deictic ones (*oft* ‘often’, *upp* ‘up’, etc.).

SF is largely absent from conversations (speaker shift contexts), but it is *not* confined to formal or old fashioned language, that is, it seems to be applicable in declarative/narrative (speaker/writer bound) contexts of variable formality (see, e.g., the informal (6b)). Some

individual cases of SF may be more formal than others, but “formality” is not a general distinguishing trait of SF.

4. Clauses with a non-trace subject gap (impersonal clauses)

– SF competes with V1 **and** *það* ‘there, it’

My survey was limited to participles (mostly in the common impersonal passive). Clause types / connectives looked at:

- (27) a. Declarative *að* ‘that’
 b. Interrogative *hvort* ‘whether, if’
 c. Conditional *ef* ‘if’
 d. Comparative *eins og* ‘as’
 e. Temporal *þegar* ‘when’, *áður en* ‘before’

(28) *Að*-clauses (there are many more types than just declaratives – so this was only checked for the *Impersonal Modal Construction* in *að*-clauses, as that construction is likely to occur in declaratives)

Subjunctive	<i>Google 14/7 2013</i>
a. <i>að</i> __ <i>hefði átt</i> <i>that (one) had ought = should have</i>	36
b. <i>að átt hefði t</i>	25
c. <i>að það hefði átt</i>	54

(29) *Interrogatives* (indicative/subjunctive)

a. <i>hvort</i> __ <i>verður/verði farið</i> <i>whether will-be.IND/SBJ gone/begun</i>	16 / 24
b. <i>hvort farið verður/verði t</i>	67 / 38
c. <i>hvort það verður/verði farið</i>	8 / 10

(30) *Conditionals* (indicative)

a. <i>ef</i> __ <i>er farið</i> <i>if is gone/begun</i>	9
--	---

- | | | |
|----|-----------------------------|---|
| b. | ef farið er <i>t</i> | 291 |
| c. | ef það er farið | 50 (including irrelevant exs
with referential <i>það</i> ‘it’) |

(31) *Comparatives* (indicative)

- | | | |
|----|--|---------------------|
| a. | eins og ___ var gert
<i>as ___ is done/made</i> | 73 |
| b. | eins og gert var <i>t</i> | 190 |
| c. | eins og það var gert | 10 (7 relevant exs) |

(32) *Temporals A* (indicative)

- | | | |
|----|--|--------------------|
| a. | þegar ___ er gengið
<i>when ___ is walked</i> | 6 |
| b. | þegar gengið er <i>t</i> | 264 |
| c. | þegar það er gengið | 7 (3 relevant exs) |

(33) *Temporals B* (indicative)

- | | | |
|----|---|----------------------------|
| a. | áður en ___ er komið
<i>before ___ is arrived/come</i> | 6 |
| c. | áður en komið er <i>t</i> | 222 |
| b. | áður en það er komið | 18 (mostly irrelevant exs) |

(34) *Main clauses* (indicative)

- | | | |
|----|---|---------------------|
| a. | ... þeirra. Er talið að (Narrative Inversion)
<i>... their.GEN. Is believed that</i> | 10 (2 relevant exs) |
| b. | ... þeirra. Það er talið að | 4 |
| c. | ... þeirra. Talið er <i>t</i> að | 47 |

All this suggests that SF is a complex phenomenon, its applicability being influenced by numerous factors. This general conclusion is further corroborated by the results in Angantýsson 2011 and Wood 2011.

5. Idiomatization?

Angantýsson 2009 points out that there are cases where SF has been idiomatized. However, such a tendency is not clearly seen for common participles.

(35) *Google 14/7 2013*

	V1	SF	Expl <i>það</i>
	C ___ er pcpl	C pcpl er	C það er pcpl
			<u>! mostly irrelevant</u> <u>exs with referential</u> <u><i>það</i></u>
Type:	if is said	if said is	if it is said
(36)	V1	SF	<i>það</i>
a. <i>ef</i> 'if'			
a1. + <i>sagt</i> 'said'	4	80	21
a2. + <i>talið</i> 'believed, counted'	1	156	81
a3. + <i>talað um</i> 'talked about'	0	63 ⁵	5
a4. + <i>spurt</i> 'asked'	4	97	12
a5. + <i>gert</i> 'done, made'	0	179	217
a6. + <i>farið</i> 'gone, begun'	9	291	51
a7. + <i>byrjað</i> 'begun'	0	93	7
a8. + <i>verið</i> 'been' ⁶	16	253	69
a9. + <i>gengið</i> 'walked'	2 ⁷	220	4
a10. + <i>lesið</i> 'read'	0	51	10
b. <i>eins og</i> 'as'			
b1. + <i>sagt</i> 'said'	31	235	27
b2. + <i>talið</i> 'believed, counted'	2	41	20
b3. + <i>talað um</i> 'talked about'	6	65 ⁸	3
b4. + <i>spurt</i> 'asked'	1	17	0 !

⁵ SF of the particle *um* (*ef um er talað*): 1

⁶ Progressive *vera að* + INF 'be at + INF' (i.e. 'be + -ing') is commonly impersonally passivized.

⁷ Both from linguistic papers about SF.

⁸ SF of the particle *um*: 3

b5.	+ <i>gert</i> 'done, made'	57	209	11
b6.	+ <i>farið</i> 'gone, begun'	6	52	4
b7.	+ <i>byrjað</i> 'begun'	4	3	1
b8.	+ <i>verið</i> 'been'	18	37	5
b9.	+ <i>gengið</i> 'walked'	0	24	0
b10.	+ <i>lesið</i> 'read'	0	4	4
c. <i>áður en</i> 'before'				
c1.	+ <i>sagt</i> 'said'	0	39	2
c2.	+ <i>talið</i> 'believed, counted'	0	18	1
c3.	+ <i>talað um</i> 'talked about'	1	18 ⁹	1
c4.	+ <i>spurt</i> 'asked'	2	24	1
c5.	+ <i>gert</i> 'done, made'	0	39	76
c6.	+ <i>farið</i> 'gone, begun'	23	283	27
c7.	+ <i>byrjað</i> 'begun'	13	112	11
c8.	+ <i>verið</i> 'been'	0	18	1
c9.	+ <i>gengið</i> 'walked'	0	212	0
c10.	+ <i>lesið</i> 'read'	0	39	9

The clause types and/or the connectives also matter:

(36)	<i>ef</i> 'if'		<i>eins og</i> 'as'		<i>áður en</i> 'before'		Totals		%SF	
	<i>VI</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>VI</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>VI</i>	<i>SF</i>	<i>VI</i>	<i>SF</i>		
1.	<i>sagt</i>	4	80	31	235	0	39	35	354	91,0%
2.	<i>talið</i>	1	156	2	41	0	18	3	215	98,6%
3.	<i>talað um</i>	0	63	6	65	1	18	7	136	95,1%
4.	<i>spurt</i>	4	97	1	17	2	24	7	138	95,2%
5.	<i>gert</i>	0	179	57	209	0	39	57	427	88,2%
6.	<i>farið</i>	9	291	6	52	23	283	38	626	94,3%
7.	<i>byrjað</i>	0	93	4	3	13	112	17	108	86,4%
8.	<i>verið</i>	16	253	18	37	0	18	34	308	90,1%
9.	<i>gengið</i>	2	220	0	24	0	212	2	456	99,6%
10.	<i>lesið</i>	0	51	0	4	0	39	0	94	100%
Totals		36	1483	125	687	39	802			
%SF			97,6%		84,6%		95,4%			

⁹ SF of the particle *um*: 0

Idiomatization of SF of individual participles does not seem to be a strong factor. The only noticeable tendency is that SF is slightly less common with *eins og* than with *ef* and *áður en*.

The **striking result** is the overall prevalence of SF as compared to V1 and expletive insertion.

If SF was a matter of formal language one would not expect these results. SF is clearly the unmarked strategy in impersonal subordinate clauses.

A caveat, though: Impersonal constructions in general might be experienced as old-fashioned or formal by some speakers.

6. And when “nothing” happens?

Angantýsson 2009:

(38) Eigendurnir segja að ___ hafi verið unnin skemmdarverk.
 owners.the say that have.SJV been done sabotage
 'The owners say that somebody has sabotaged their property.'

(39) Það breytist þegar ___ fer að rigna.
 it changes when begins.IND to rain
 'It will change when it starts raining.'

		The youngest speakers (261 informants)			The oldest speakers (159 informants)		
		ok	?	*	ok	?	*
38	að ___ hafi: that ___ have	34,8%	29,3%	35,9%	25,6%	25,0%	49,4%
39	þegar ___ fer: when ___ begins	65%	18,5%	16,5%	90,6%	5,7%	3,8%

Google 14/7 2013: No relevant examples of *að hafi verið unnin* ‘that have been done’ (but 13 examples embedded under a relative clause). 24 hits (pages) with *þegar fer að rigna* ‘when begins to rain’, and 131 with *þegar fer að* ‘when begins to’.

Some researchers (see, e.g., Kosmeijer 1993, Holmberg & Platzack 1995, Holmberg 2000), have assumed that subordinate V1 is a barely existent EPP violation. That is an unwarranted assumption. As so many other (partial) null-subject languages, Icelandic does not obey any narrowly syntactic EPP requirement.

Nevertheless, the frequency of SF suggests that filling the left edge of a declarative CP is some kind of an externalization or performance target – a generally “desirable PF goal” (Sigurðsson 2010), at least when leaving Spec,CP empty does not serve some specific “purpose” (as in narrative inversion).

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