On Stylistic Fronting

Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson
Lund University

This is a handout of a talk given in Tübingen 2010,[1] updated 2013, focusing on a number of empirical questions regarding Stylistic Fronting that have remained moot. The results accord with the theoretical approach developed in Sigurðsson 2010.[2] 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).[3] 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.

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[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] And, mutatis mutandis, with the spirit of the approach in Holmberg 2000. The main difference is that EPP is understood not to be a principle of the narrow syntax of internal language but rather a "desirable PF goal" (perhaps operative for processing reasons – a question that is however not pursued here).

[3] 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): c1. SF applies in finite clauses only

                                          c2. SF is strictly clause-bounded

                                          c3. SF is common in subordinate clauses

    d. Precondition: SF is preconditioned by a "subject gap"[4]

    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 …'

<div align="right">gthg.blog.is/blog/gthg/entry/202600/ – March 8, 2010</div>

    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 …'

<div align="right">blogs.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=blog.view...blogId – March 8, 2010</div>

    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 …'

<div align="right">asarut.blogcentral.is/ – March 8, 2010</div>

Topicalization, in contrast (see 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"

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[4] But see Hrafnbjargarson 2004 for a different understanding.

Many questions remain moot:

- How common is it?
- 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** $^{ok}\_\_$ ^{ok}SF $*það^5$
(i.e., clauses relativized/extracted from)

B. Clauses with a **non-trace** subject gap $^{ok/??}\_\_$ ^{ok}SF $^{ok}það$
 B1. Subjectless impersonal clauses
 B2. Clauses with a "late" subject

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[5] 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 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
        '… 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. <u>Subjectless</u> 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.bloggar.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 <u>late subject</u>:

(6) a. … þegar __ verða komnir <u>bjórkælar</u> 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 <u>hvolpar</u> …
          when come.PL will_be.3PL   puppies

4

'… when puppies will have arrived/come into being …'

c. … þegar **það**   verða   komnir   <u>hvolpar</u> …
      when   there   will_be.3PL come.PL puppies
      '… when puppies will have arrived/come into being …'

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

| − SF competes with V1, **not** with *það* |

My study is limited to relative clauses introduced by *sem* = 'that, who'

Halldor Sigurðsson's intuitions   *Google 14/7 2013*

# of pages

(7) a. ^{ok}sem __   hafa   verið   …   221
        that   have.3PL been
     b. ^{ok}sem **verið**$_i$ hafa t_i …   221
        that been   have

(8) a. ^{ok}sem __   hafa   farið   …   250
        that   have   gone
     b. ^{ok}sem **farið**$_i$ hafa t_i …   252
        that gone   have

(9) a. ^{ok}sem   __   hafa   lesið   …   153
        that   have   read
     b. ^{ok}sem   **lesið**$_i$ hafa t_i …   80
        that   read   have

(10) a. ^{ok}sem   __   hafa   búið   þar …   23
        that   have   lived there
     b. $^{?}$sem   **búið**$_i$ hafa t_i þar ...   11
        that   lived   have   there
     c. ^{ok}sem   **þar**$_i$ hafa   búið t_i...   29
        that   there   have   lived

(11) a. ^{ok}sem   __   hafa   búið í Danmörku …   6
        that   have   lived in Denmark

5

b. ^(?)sem **búið**   hafa   *t*   í Danmörku …   16

    that   lived   have   in Denmark

c. ^{??}sem **í Danmörku**   hafa   búið *t*...   **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 Olsó** 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"):

			HS intuitions	*Google 14/7 2013*

(16) a.   sem __   tóku   þessa ákvörðun   ^{ok}   27

          that   took.3PL this   decision.ACC

          'who/that made this decision.'

      b.   sem **þessa ákvörðun** tóku *t*   ...   ^{ok}   11

      c.   sem **þessa erfiðu**   **ákvörðun** tóku *t* ...   ^(?)   0

          that   this   difficult decision   took

(17) a. sem __ komu   til landsins   ^ok   110
         that   came.3PL to country.the
     b. sem **til landsins**   komu *t* …   ^ok   22
         that to country.the came

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.'

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		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:

				Google *14/7 2013*:	
(20)	a.	sem __ er skrifuð.F.SG	/ sem **skrifuð** er	89	/ 130
		that is written			
	b.	sem __ var skrifuð	/ sem **skrifuð** var	85	/ 137
		that was written			
	c.	sem __ hefur verið skrifuð	/ sem **skrifuð** hefur verið	29	/ 69
		that has been written			
	d.	sem __ hafði verið skrifuð	/ sem **skrifuð** hafði verið	6	/ 11
		that had been written			

(21)	a.	sem __ er skrifað.NT.SG	/ 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.M.SG	/ 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.F.SG	/ 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.NT.SG	/ 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.M.SG	/ 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 *að*-clause types than just declaratives – this was only checked for a construction that is unlikely to occur in non-declarative *að*-clauses).

Subjunctive   *Google 14/7 2013*

a.   að __ hefði átt   36
      that (one) had ought = should have

b.   að **átt** hefði *t*   25

c.   að **það** hefði átt   54

(29) *Interrogatives* (indicative/subjunctive)

a.   hvort __ verður/verði farið   16 / 24
     whether will-be.IND/SBJ gone/begun

b.   hvort **farið** verður/verði *t*   67 / 38

c.   hvort **það** verður/verði farið   8 / 10

(30) *Conditionals* (indicative)

a.   ef __ er farið   9
     if is gone/begun

b.   ef **farið** er *t*   291

c.   ef **það** er farið   50 (including irrelevant exs
                                                               with referential *það* 'it')

(31) *Comparatives* (indicative)

a.   eins og __ var gert   73
     as __ was done/made

b.   eins og **gert** var *t*   190

c.   eins og **það** var gert   10 (7 relevant exs)

(32) *Temporals A* (indicative)

a.   þegar __ er gengið   6
     when __ is walked

b.   þegar **gengið** er *t*   264

c.   þegar **það** er gengið   7 (3 relevant exs)

(33) *Temporals B* (indicative)

a.   áður en __ er komið   6
     before __ is arrived/come

c.   áður en **komið** er *t*   222

b.   áður en **það** er komið   18 (mostly irrelevant exs)

(34) *Main clauses* (indicative)

a. … þeirra. Er talið að   (Narrative Inversion)   10 (2 relevant exs)
    … their.GEN. Is believed that
b. … þeirra. **Það** er talið að   4
c. … þeirra. **Talið** er *t* að   47

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

5. Idiomatization?

Angantýsson (2009, 2011:152ff.) points out that there are cases where SF has been idiomatized, and I share his intuition in this respect. However, such a tendency is not clearly seen for common participles.

(35)   *Google 14/7 2013*

	V1	SF	Expl *það*
	C __ er pcpl	C **pcpl** er	C **það** er pcpl
			! mostly irrelevant exs with referential *það*

(36)		V1	SF	*það*
a.	*ef* 'if'			
a1.	+ *sagt* 'said'	4	80	21
a2.	+ *talið* 'believed, counted'	1	156	81
a3.	+ *talað um* 'talked about'	0	63[6]	5
a4.	+ *spurt* 'asked'	4	97	12
a5.	+ *gert* 'done, made'	0	179	217
a6.	+ *farið* 'gone, begun'	9	291	51
a7.	+ *byrjað* 'begun'	0	93	7
a8.	+ *verið* 'been'[7]	16	253	69
a9.	+ *gengið* 'walked'	2[8]	220	4
a10.	+ *lesið* 'read'	0	51	10

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[6] SF of the particle *um* (*ef um er talað*): 1

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

[8] Both these examples are from linguistic papers about SF.

b.   *eins og* 'as'

b1.	+ *sagt* 'said'	31	235	27
b2.	+ *talið* 'believed, counted'	2	41	20
b3.	+ *talað um* 'talked about'	6	65[9]	3
b4.	+ *spurt* 'asked'	1	17	0	!
b5.	+ *gert* 'done, made'	57	209	11
b6.	+ *farið* 'gone, begun'	6	52	4
b7.	+ *byrjað* 'begun'	4	3	1
b8.	+ verið 'been'	18	37	5
b9.	+ *gengið* 'walked'	0	24	0
b10.	+ *lesið* 'read'	0	4	4

c.   *áður en* 'before'

c1.	+ *sagt* 'said'	0	39	2
c2.	+ *talið* 'believed, counted'	0	18	1
c3.	+ *talað um* 'talked about'	1	18[10]	1
c4.	+ *spurt* 'asked'	2	24	1
c5.	+ *gert* 'done, made'	0	39	76
c6.	+ *farið* 'gone, begun'	23	283	27
c7.	+ *byrjað* 'begun'	13	112	11
c8.	+ verið 'been'	0	18	1
c9.	+ *gengið* 'walked'	0	212	0
c10.	+ *lesið* 'read'	0	39	9

The clause types and/or the connectives also matter:

(36)		*ef* 'if'		*eins og* 'as'		*áður en* 'before'		Totals		%SF
		V1	SF	V1	SF	V1	SF	V1	SF	
1.	*sagt*	4	80	31	235	0	39	35	354	91,0%
2.	*talið*	1	156	2	41	0	18	3	215	98,6%
3.	*talað um*	0	63	6	65	1	18	7	136	95,1%
4.	*spurt*	4	97	1	17	2	24	7	138	95,2%
5.	*gert*	0	179	57	209	0	39	57	427	88,2%
6.	*farið*	9	291	6	52	23	283	38	626	94,3%
7.	*byrjað*	0	93	4	3	13	112	17	108	86,4%

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[9] SF of the particle *um*: 3

[10] SF of the particle *um*: 0

8.	*verið*	16	253	18	37	0	18	34	308	90,1%
9.	*gengið*	2	220	0	24	0	212	2	456	99,6%
10.	*lesið*	0	51	0	4	0	39	0	94	100%
Totals		36	1483	125	687	39	802			
%SF			97,6%		84,6%		95,4%			

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., Kosmejer 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 in impersonal constructions 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, e.g., in narrative inversion).

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