Various studies on Heavy NP Shift (HNPS) in English converge on the conclusion that the frequency of HNPS is not only determined by the heaviness of the displaced object, measured in the number of words. The relative heaviness of the object vs. the word string between the main verb and the object plays a significant role as well (Hawkins 1994, Wasow 1997, Stallings & MacDonald 2011). This paper presents the results of two surveys on HNPS in Icelandic and Faroese, where speakers evaluated sentences with shifted subjects and direct objects. The NPs were all shifted across a VP-modifying PP and the length of the NP and the PP was controlled. The results show that HNPS with both subjects and direct objects is acceptable to most Icelandic speakers and to some Faroese speakers, although Faroese speakers clearly prefer shifted objects to subjects. The survey also revealed that different factors contribute to how speakers of these two languages evaluate sentences with shifted arguments. For Icelandic speakers it is important that the NP is relatively heavier than the PP it shifts across, whereas Faroese speakers do not seem to be sensitive to this factor. Also, a number of speakers of both languages accept shifted NPs that cannot be considered long and are even relatively shorter than the PP. This tells us that for some speakers it is perfectly acceptable to shift NPs that would generally not be considered heavy at all.


Keywords: variation, syntax, word order.