

# Aspects of the Syntax of Irish

This assignment concerns the organization of clauses and related matters in Irish. Your task is to go as far as you can in constructing an analysis of the patterns laid out below—one which is consistent with the framework which has gradually been emerging in the course of the quarter's work and which illuminates the Irish-internal patterns.

## PART ONE

The data in this section should give you a sense of what the general typological cut of the language is.

- (1)
- a. an teach beag compórdach  
the house little comfortable  
'the comfortable little house'
  - b. fear beag ribeach rua  
man little hairy red-haired  
'a little hairy red-haired man'
  - c. eagla roimh an Ghorta  
fear before the famine  
'fear of famine'
  - d. an dúil s-a litríocht  
the liking in-the literature  
'the liking for literature'
  - e. mo mhuinín as an rialtas  
my confidence out-of the government  
'my confidence in the government'
- (2)
- a. iontach ceanúil ar an tae  
very fond on the tea  
'very fond of tea'
  - b. ró- bhródúil as na girseachaí  
too proud out-of the girls  
'too proud of the girls'
  - c. níos bródúla as na gasraí  
more proud[COMP] out-of the boys  
'prouder of the boys'
- (3)
- a. gan náire  
without shame  
'without shame'
  - b. go Baile Átha Cliath  
to Dublin  
'to Dublin'
  - c. chun an locha  
to the lake[GEN]  
'to the lake'

## PART TWO

The data in this section is designed to illustrate what finite clauses in Irish look like.

We start with root clauses, whose form is illustrated in (4):

- (4)
- a. Sciob an cat an t-eireaball den luch.  
cut[PAST] the cat the tail off-the mouse  
'The cat cut the tail off the mouse.'
  - b. Chonaic na gasraí capall mór bán ansin inné.  
see[PAST] the boys horse big white there yesterday  
'The boys saw a great white horse there yesterday.'
  - c. Bhéarfaidh mé an t-airgead do Chaoimhín i nDoire inniu.  
give[FUT] I the money to Kevin in Derry today  
'I'll give Kevin the money in Derry today.'
  - d. Fuair sé nuachtán Meiriceánach ón-a dheartháir an lá cheana.  
get[PAST] he newspaper American from-his brother the-other-day  
'He got an American newspaper from his brother the other day.'

The variations in (5) are absolutely impossible:

- (5)
- a. \*An cat sciob an t-eireaball den luch.
  - b. \*Na gasraí chonaic capall mór bán ansin inné.
  - c. \*Mé bhéarfaidh an t-airgead do Chaoimhín i nDoire inniu.
  - d. \*Sé fuair nuachtán Meiriceánach ón-a dheartháir an lá cheana.

Yes-No questions are formed as shown in (6):

- (6)
- a. A-r cuir tú isteach ar an phost?  
INTERR-PAST put[PAST] you in on the job  
'Did you apply for the job?'
  - b. A' n-ólann sí tae?  
INTERR drink[PRES] she tea  
'Does she drink tea?'
  - c. A' bhfaighidh mé bas?  
INTERR get[FUT] I death  
'Will I die?' (*lit* 'Will I get (a) death?')

The examples in (7) and (8) illustrate the form of non-root finite clauses:

- (7)
- a. Creideann sé gu-r dhiúltaigh sí mé.  
believe[PRES] he C-PAST refuse[PAST] she me  
'He believes that she turned me down.'
  - b. Dúirt siad go dtabharfadh siad bainne don ghamhain.  
say[PAST] they C give[COND] they milk to-the calf  
'They said that they would give milk to the calf.'
  - c. sul a dtig siad chun tí  
before C come[PRES] they to house[GEN]  
'before they come to (the) house'
  - d. fiafróidh sí de mo dheirfiúr a-r cuir sí isteach ar an phost.  
ask[FUT] she of my sister INTERR-PAST put[PAST] she in on the job  
'She will ask my sister if she applied for the job.'

(8), meanwhile, illustrates the slightly special case of relative clauses:

- (8) a. na h-eochracha a d- fhág tú sa-n oifig  
 the keys C PAST leave[PAST] you in-the office  
 ‘the keys that you left in the office’  
 b. an saibhreas a d- ardaigh sé leis  
 the riches C PAST lifted he with-him  
 ‘the riches that he made off with’

A note is probably in order about the elements *-r* and *d-* which appear in (8) and in many of the examples presented earlier here ((7d), (7a), (6a) and so on). These are two variant forms of the past tense marker. For our present purposes, it doesn't matter what factors force the appearance of one form or the other (the relevant 'rules' are complex and riddled with irregularities). It may be helpful for you to know, though, that the *-r* form is enclitic (it leans on the element immediately to its left) while the *d-* form is proclitic (it leans on the element immediately to its right). In addition to the presence of this marker, the verb itself may be in past form. This is indicated in the glosses by way of the feature [PAST] following the verb stem.

### PART THREE

Beside the simple cases so far illustrated, Irish possesses a periphrastic construction for the expression of progressive aspect. Some typical examples are presented in (9). Progressive forms of verbs (progressive participles) are formed by prefixing a nonfinite form of the verb with the element *ag*, which is historically a reduced and grammaticized form of the preposition meaning 'at'.

- (9) a. Tá na ceoltóirí ag magadh orm.  
 be[PRES] the musicians PROG mock on-me  
 ‘The musicians are making fun of me.’  
 b. Bíonn na sagairt i gcónaí ag rá a gcuid paidreacha.  
 be[PRES-HABIT] the priests always PROG say their share prayers[GEN]  
 ‘The priests are always saying their prayers.’  
 c. Beidh muid ag dúil leis na cuairteoirí.  
 be[FUT] we PROG expect with the visitors  
 ‘We'll be expecting the visitors.’

(i) What is the category of the phrase *ag rá a gcuid paidreacha* in (9b) (and similar sequences in the other examples of (9))?

(ii) How do you square your answer to the previous question with the existence of (10)?

- (10) Dúirt na sagairt a gcuid paidreacha.  
 say[PAST] the priests their share prayers[GEN]  
 ‘The priests said their prayers.’

The progressive phrases seen in (9) also appear in the kind of environment illustrated in (11):

- (11) a. Chonaic mé na sagairt ag rá a gcuid paidreacha.  
 see[PAST] I the priests PROG say their share prayers[GEN]  
 ‘I saw the priests saying their prayers.’  
 b. Chuala mé na ceoltóirí ag magadh orm.  
 hear[PAST] I the musicians PROG mock on-me  
 ‘I heard the musicians making fun of me.’

Note especially (12):

- (12) a. Chuala mé na sagairt ag urnaí agus na ceoltóirí ag gabhail ceoil.  
hear[PAST] I the priests PROG pray and the musicians PROG make music  
'I heard the priests praying and the musicians making music.'
- b. Chonaic na daoine céanna na fir ag caoineadh agus na mná ag gabhail ceoil.  
see[PAST] the people same the men PROG cry and the women PROG make music  
'The same people saw the men crying and the women making music.'

This would probably be a good point at which to pause, take stock, and see if you can build an analysis of the facts presented so far—one which is broadly consistent with our framework of assumptions.

## PART FOUR

If you have been successful in building an analysis of the data presented so far, the facts which we present in this section should be, in an important sense, unsurprising.

### 4.1 YES AND NO IN IRISH

Not every language has words which serve the functions served in English by *yes* and *no*. Irish has no such words.

- (13) a. A-r chuir tú isteach ar an phost?  
INTERR-PAST put[PAST] you in on the job  
'Did you apply for the job?'
- b. Chuir.  
put[PAST]  
Yes.
- c. Ní-r chuir.  
NEG-PAST put[PAST]  
No.

In grammar books, this pattern is usually described in something like the following terms

In replying to questions, (1) the verb used in the question must be repeated in the reply, (2) the subject must be omitted.

*Modern Irish Grammar*, J. P. Craig, Sealy, Briers & Walker, Dublin 1900: p. 144

### 4.2 BEYOND YES AND NO

These single-word sentences are not restricted to the responsive function. They appear in coordinate structures as in (14), and in so-called *Tag Questions* as in (15):

- (14) Dúirt siad go dtiocfadh siad, ach ní tháinig.  
say[PAST] they C come[COND] they but NEG come[PAST]  
'They said that they would come but they didn't.'
- (15) Beidh muid connáilte, nach mbeidh?  
be[FUT] we frozen NEG INTERR C be[FUT]  
'We'll be frozen, won't we?'

Examples like (16) are also possible:

- (16) le heagla go gceapfa go bhfuil, níl aon cheann de leabhra an Oileáin léite agam  
for fear C you-would-think C is is-not any one of books the Island read by-me  
'Lest you think there are, there aren't any of the Island books read by me.' GILNL 61

### 4.3 A RESTRICTION

There are also important restrictions on the use of this grammatical possibility however. For example, imagine walking into a room which is very dirty and which clearly needs cleaning. Imagine further that you are carrying a vacuum cleaner, a bucket of soapy water, some polish, a mop, and many clean rags. You still cannot announce:

- (17) Glanfaidh  
clean[FUT]  
'I will (clean this).'

### 4.4 A CHALLENGE

Construct an analysis of these so-called 'responsive forms'. In doing this, relate your proposals back to:

- (i) the analysis of Irish clause structure you constructed in Part Three
- (ii) our class discussion of the typology of ellipsis structures

## PART FIVE

If your analysis so far is in good shape, the facts reported in this section should also be unsurprising to you.

### 5.1 A REQUIREMENT AND A NON-REQUIREMENT

The following examples, though easily interpretable, are ungrammatical:

- (18) a. \*Ní -r cheannaigh mé teach ariamh, ach dhíol.  
NEG PAST buy[PAST] I house ever but sell[PAST]  
'He criticized himself, but he won't again.'
- b. \*Cé gu -r mhol an bainisteoir na himreoirí inné, cháin inniu.  
although C [PAST] praise the manager the players yesterday, criticized today  
'Although the manager praised the players yesterday, he criticized them today.'
- c. \*Ní -r éist sí le-n-a cuid daltáí ach labhair.  
NEG PAST listen she with-her portion pupils but spoke  
'She didn't listen to her pupils but she spoke to them'
- d. \*Cháin sé é féin, ach ag an am chéanna chosain.  
criticized he him [REFL] but at the time same defended  
'He criticized himself, but at the same time he defended himself.'

Are you now in a position to understand why (18a–d) are impossible?

In contrast with what is documented in (18), the following examples are flawless:

- (19) a. Ní -r cheannaigh mé teach ariamh, ach ceannóidh.  
NEG PAST buy I house ever but buy [FUT]  
'I never bought a house, but I will.'
- b. Cé gu -r mhol an bainisteoir na himreoirí inné, ní mholfaidh inniu.  
although C [PAST] praise the manager the players yesterday, NEG praise [FUT] today  
'Although the manager praised the players yesterday, he won't today.'
- c. Ní -r éist sí le-n-a cuid daltáí ach éistfidh as seo amach.  
NEG PAST listen she with-her portion pupils but listen [FUT] from this out  
'She didn't listen to her pupils but she will from now on.'
- d. Cháin sé é féin, ach ní cháinfidh arís.  
criticized he him [REFL] but NEG criticize [FUT]  
'He criticized himself, but he won't again.'

Why should these examples be possible? Do we now understand these observations and in particular do we understand the contrast between (19) and (18)? Think hard about this question; there is more than one aspect to it.

## 5.2 A FINAL CHALLENGE

If you're still with us, and you're still on your feet, and your analysis is in good shape, you should also now understand why the examples in (20)–(22) are well-formed:

- (20) Thug Peats dhá leathchoróin dom agus Geraldeen leathchoróin dom.  
 give[PAST] two half-crown to-me and half-crown to-me  
 'Pats gave me two half-crowns and Geraldeen gave me a half-crown.' ABFS 23
- (21) ghreamaigh a lámh don chleite agus a' gé don tábla  
 stick[PAST] his hand to-the feather and the goose to-the table  
 'his hand stuck to the feather and the goose stuck to the table' SAB 236
- (22) Ní -r thug an t-Údarás aon chabhair dúinn, nó an Chomhairle Chontae aon tacaíocht  
 NEG PAST give[PAST] the Authority any help to-us or the Council County[GEN] any support  
 dúinn.  
 to-us  
 'The Authority didn't give us any help and the County Council didn't give us any support.' RNG 23-2-05

Do you?

(Your answer to this question should not contain the phrase 'some sort of deletion'.)