Incorporation, Focus and the Phonology of Ellipsis in Irish

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1 Setting the Scene

vso order in finite clauses

Irish is (more or less rigidly) vso in all finite clauses:

(1) Má bhriseann tú an fhaocha, tifidh tú na castái atá ina leath deiridh.
if open.pres you the periwinkle see.fut you the twists c-be.pres in-its half rear.gen
'If you break open a periwinkle, you will see the twists that are in its hind parts.'

(2) verb < subject < object < oblique arguments < adverbials

strong and weak forms of pronouns

(3)

	ORTHOGRAPHY	STRONG FORM	WEAK FORM
3rd sg masc, non-subject	é	[eː]	[ə]
3rd sg fem, non-subject	í	[iː]	[i]
3rd pl, non-subject	iad	[iad]/[iəd]	[əd]
1st sg	mé	[meː]	[mə]

A distinction not recognized in any orthographic system, but of central importance for matters of word order, realization of focus, coordination and so on. (Ó Sé (2000: 155–59), Ó Baoill (1996: 88-89), Lucas (1979: 93))

an assumption

With Bennett et al. (2013, 2015), assume that the weak/strong distinction reflects a lexical choice—each pronoun has a strong form and a weak form, the choice between them being free; the form selected for use in a given derivation is then subject to the usual vicissitudes of variable and context-sensitive phonetic realization.

placement of weak pronouns

Weak non-subject pronouns may (but need not) displace to the right (Bennett et al. (2013, 2015)):

(4) a. Fuair   sé nuachtán Meiriceánach óna   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.'

   b. Fuair   sé _ óna   dheartháir an lá cheana   é .
get[PAST] he   from-his brother the-other-day it
'He got it from his brother the other day.'

(5)   chonac   _ ag   féachaint uirthi é go drúisiúil
see.past.s1 prog look   at-her him lasciviously
'I saw him looking at her lasciviously.'   LG 314

(6)   [v DP Pron XP → YP → ZP →]

Bennett et al. (2013, 2015):
Pronoun Postposing is a prosodic response to a prosodic dilemma – namely when syntactically defined word order patterns will end up violating the contrainst in (7):

(7) strong start: Prosodic constituents above the level of the word should not have at their left edge an immediate sub-constituent which is smaller than the word.

(8) pronoun postposing:
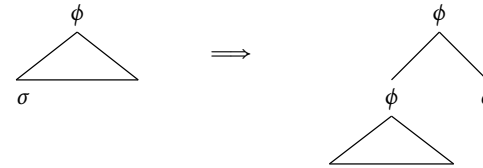
subject pronouns

Weak subject pronouns never postpose.

(9) a. *Chuir   _ mo lámh 'mo   phóca mé .
put[PAST]   my hand in-my pocket I
'I put my hand in my pocket.'
   b. Chuir mé mo lámh 'mo phóca.

but: the prosodic dilemma which, according to Bennett et al. (2013, 2015), drives postposing in (8) (the appearance of an over-weak element at the left edge of a ϕ-phrase) also holds in (9a).

because: the ϕ-phrase which corrresponds to the entire post-verbal constituent has the subject pronoun at its left edge and subject pronouns may be weak.

and: one of the most important results emerging from Elfner (2012, 2015) is that this matching prosodic structure actually turns up under the right (prosodic) circumstances:

(10)   (($_\omega$ v) ($_\phi$ subject complement))

Which in turn suggests two questions:
   question 1. Why is that repair (postposing) not available to subject pronouns?
   question 2. How is that prosodic dilemma actually resolved for subject pronouns?

answer: Subject pronouns have a better way of resolving the dilemma.

2 Subject Pronoun Incorporation

In finite clauses, weak subject pronouns incorporate into the verbal complex to their left (Chung & McCloskey (1987: 226–228), Doherty (1996: 23–25), Ackema & Neeleman (2003), Ó Baoill (1996: 88–89), Lucas (1979: p. 120, §461))

(11) Chonaic mé fear mór ar an bhealach mhór.
      saw   I   man big on the way   great
      'I saw a large man in the roadway.'

(12) a. SPI: (xanikʲmə) (fʲar moːr) (erʲəvalax woːr)
     b. Simple subject pronouns right-adjoin to the inflected verb.

(13) SIMPLE SUBJECT PRONOUNS:
     a. are monomorphemic
     b. syntactically simple (they are bare D's)
     c. are incapable of being focused

(14) Chuaigh si-se   i dtreo na gcnoc, agus chuaigh mi-se   i dtreo na farraige.
      go.PAST she–CONTR towards the hills   and go.PAST I–CONTR towards the sea
      'SHE went towards the hills and I went towards the sea.'

ANSWER TO QUESTIONS 1 AND 2: The availability of SPI:
  ○ resolves the prosodic dilemma which drives Pronoun Postposing (QUESTION 2)
  ○ preempts postposing, yielding the impossibility of (9a) (QUESTION 1).

PATTERNS OF ALLOMORPHY

TYPE ONE
In the dialects of Munster, the future tense ending spelled *-f(a)idh* is normally realized as /hɨɡʲ/. But before a simple pronoun, it is realized as /hɨ/:
cuirfidh Meáig: /kirʲhɨɡʲ mʲaːɡʲ/ ('Meg will put'), but:
cuirfidh mé: /kirʲhɨme/ ('I will put')

TYPE TWO
In Donegal and in Mayo, the conditional ending spelled *-f(e)adh* is normally realized either as /huː/ or as /hu/ depending on the dialect. It is realized as /hitʲ/ before a simple subject pronoun with initial /ʃ/:
chuirfeadh Seán: /xirʲhu ʃaːn/ ('Sean would put') but:
chuirfeadh sé: /xirʲhitʲʃə/ ('He would put')

TYPE THREE
In Donegal and in Mayo, the stem ending spelled *-(a)igh* (on which see especially Ó Sé (1991)) is normally realized as long /iː/ or as short /i/. It is realized as /ə/ before a simple pronoun:
d'imigh Séamas: /dʲɨmiː ʃeːməs/ ('Seamas left'), but:
*d'imigh sé*: /dʲɨməʃə/ ('He left')

TYPE FOUR
The 3rd person pronouns all have initial palatal /ʃ/, as seen in many of the examples already cited. However, in the Irish of Oileán Cléire , the conditional ending /-həx/ and the past habitual ending /-əx/ trigger depalatalization of /ʃ/ to /s/.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE ALLOMORPHY PATTERNS

○ Linear adjacency is not an adequate locality condition on the licensing of allomorph selection (see Bobaljik (2012), Svenonius (2012), Merchant (2013: 19, fn. 18 and passim).

○ These patterns are consistent with reasonable theories of locality of allomorph selection (see for instance Embick (2012), Bobaljik (2012), Arregi & Nevins (2013), Merchant (2013)) only if the pronoun is within the same complex word as the morpheme whose shape is being affected.

○ Note especially that some of Bobaljik's (2012) most important typological results (e.g. the *Root Suppletion Generalization* and the *Synthetic Superlative Generalization*) depend on this 'relatively uncontentious view of locality' being true (see Bobaljik (2012: 67–103)).

○ These observations then entail (in harmony with the observations concerning enclisis) that SPI involves the creation of a complex word which includes the finite verb and the subject pronoun.

3 The Syntax of the Clause and of the Finite Verb

(15) STRUCTURE OF THE CLAUSE IN IRISH
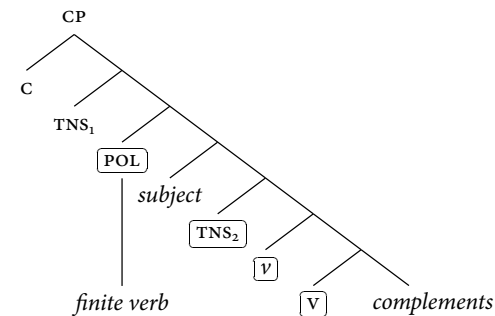
The finite verb lexicalizes the contiguous span: { V, *v*, TNS₂ POL }

(16) gur   chuidigh siad len- a chéile.
      C-PAST help.PAST they with each other
      'that they helped each other'

(17)

GOOD CONSEQUENCE ONE:
All the material following the finite verb is a syntactic constituent (McCloskey (2011)).

GOOD CONSEQUENCE TWO:
We understand the evidence that the subject raises (McCloskey (2001)).

GOOD CONSEQUENCE THREE:
We understand the relation between nonfinite and finite clauses

GOOD CONSEQUENCE FOUR:
We understand how all of this is consistent with VSO surface order.

GOOD CONSEQUENCE FIVE:
We understand responsive ellipsis.

4 RESPONSIVE ELLIPSIS

(18)　Ar　　chuir　tú　isteach ar　an phost? Chuir.
　　　Q-.PAST put.PAST you in　　on the job　　put.PAST
　　　'Did you apply for the job?　Yes I did.'

ANALYSIS

- Elision of the complement of the head to which the verb raises. The verb (having raised) survives; the subject (being trapped within the ellipsis site) does not. (McCloskey (1991, 2005, 2011), Doron (1991, 1999), Sherman (Ussishkin) (1998), Goldberg (2002, 2005), Ngonyani (1996), Martins (1994, 2000), Gribanova (2010, 2011, 2013), Schloormemmer & Temmerman (2011), Takita (2013).)
- In the present context: elision of the complement of the polarity head.

A NICE CONSEQUENCE

The parallelism between Responsive Ellipsis in Irish and VP ellipsis in English can be understood—if English VP ellipsis can also be construed as elision of the complement of the polarity head (low in English (selecting *v*) but high in Irish (selecting the lower of the two Tense heads)). Lobeck (1995), Potsdam (1997)

(19) a.　D'iarr　mé air　　a theacht　　ach deir sé nach dtiocfaidh.
　　　　PAST-ask I　on-him come.NON-FIN but say　he NEG-C come.FUT
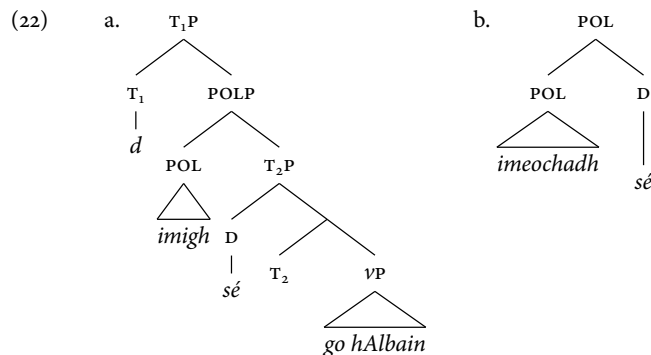　　　　'I asked him to come but he says that he won't.'

　　b.　IRISH:
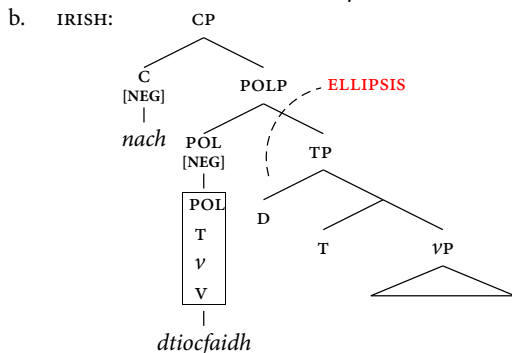
(20) a.　You CAN smoke in these rooms, but we suggest that you not.
　　b.　ENGLISH:
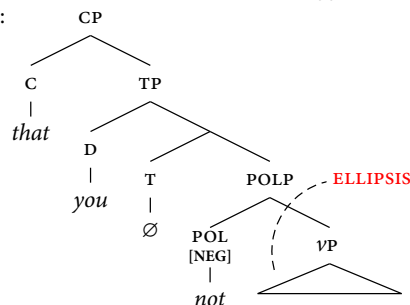
5 INCORPORATION AGAIN

(21)　D' imigh　　sé go hAlbain.
　　　T₁ leave.PAST he to　Scotland
　　　'He left for Scotland.'

(22) a.

　　b.

(23)　SUBJECT PRONOUN INCORPORATION

- is post-syntactic (has no syntactic or semantic effects),
- should not be understood in prosodic terms,
- is obligatory,
- shows standard intervention effects
- creates morphologically complex words which constitute the domain for the patterns of allomorphic variation considered in section 2 above, and
- preempts the building of prosodic structures which would threaten a violation of STRONG START.
- This is why incorporated subject pronouns never postpose – they are never at the left edge of phonological phrases and therefore never threaten the kinds of violations for which postposing is a repair.

(24)　SUMMARY
　　　SPI is a morphological head movement, subject to the normal locality conditions (closest command) on such head movements – in effect the proposal of Doherty (1996) in a changed theoretical context.

6 A Curious Phenomenon—the Special Focus Construction

(25) a. Cuir síos é.   Ní rachaidh **sé** síos.
       put down it   neg go .fut   it down
       'Put it down.'   'It won't **go** down.'

   b. An   ngéillfidh siad? Caithfidh **siad**.
      interr yield.fut they must   they
      'Will they yield (on this)? They **have** to.'

the puzzle: Structures like (25) are curious in several ways:

(26) ○   An incorporated simple pronoun is strongly accented.
   ○   But recall that un-augmented (i.e. simple) pronouns can otherwise never bear a focal accent; see the discusion around (14) above,
   ○   And in fact in semantic terms, it is not the pronoun which is focussed. In both examples of (26), in fact, the pronoun is given/familiar.

Greene (1973:128):

> In the latter conjugation, the normally enclitic pronouns may be stressed in emphatic replies … with a pronoun stressed equally with the verb (it should be noted that in this construction it is the action which is stressed, not the agent) … Stressed pronouns in this case have always their long vowel form, in Scottish Gaelic as well as in Irish.

Greene's reference to 'stress on the action rather than on the agent' is consistent with the examples in (26), but Brian Ó Curnáin (2007:Volume One, p. 391, §383) has a different interpretation when he speaks of:
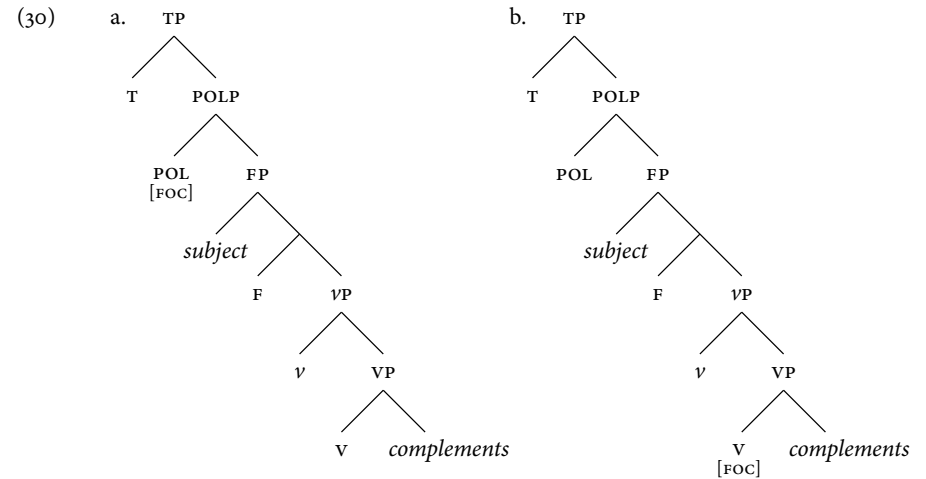
> the … common use of double stress or stress shift used to emphasize the truth or propositional meaning of an utterance

verum focus

(27) a. 'nois, bain giota dó   'na bhaile.
       now, take bit   of-it home
       'Now, head off home.'

   b. Tá   **mé** a' gabhail 'na bhaile. Níl   mé a' fanacht áit   ar bith nach bhfuil
      be .pres I go prog home   am-not I stay prog place any   neg-c be .pres
      iarraidh orm.
      want   on-me
      'I **am** going home. I'm not staying anywhere I'm not wanted.'   rng 26-5-08

(28) Níl   sé furasta a leithéid a dhéanamh.
     neg-be.pres it easy   its like   do.non-fin
     'It's **not** easy to do such a thing.'   rng 03-09-2014

(29) amharcann siad air   mar fhear a bhí ag troid ar son   saoirse, agus
     look .pres they on-him as   man c was fighting for-the-sake of freedom and
     throid   **sé** ar mhaithe le saoirse
     fight [past] he for   freedom
     'they regard him as a man who fought for freedom, and he **did** fight for freedom.'rng
     12-11-10

an initial understanding

What the syntax delivers:

(30)   a. [TP diagram: TP → T, POLP; POLP → POL[foc], FP; FP → subject, (F, vp); vp → v, VP; VP → v, complements]

   b. [TP diagram: TP → T, POLP; POLP → POL, FP; FP → subject, (F, vp); vp → v, VP; VP → v[foc], complements]

What the morphology (including spi) delivers – two kinds of complex morphological words corresponding to Verum Focus ((30a) and (31a)) and Verbal Focus ((30b) and (31b)) respectively:

(31) a. verum focus: {{ v   v f pol } d }
                                        [foc]
   b. verbal focus: {{ v   v f pol } d }
                          [foc]

Purely phonological processes and constraints now conspire to place the two accents at different edges of the phonological words corresponding to the morphological words in (31)– at the left edge and at the right edge.

what we understand

(32) a.   The otherwise suprising fact that the special focus construction always features simple (monomorphemic) pronouns – only they are input to the head-movement which yields the verbal complex.
   b.   Special Focus is parasitic on a prior application of spi– this is the morphological operation which creates the complex morphological words (compounds) which then host the two accents (lexical and focal). Therefore we understand why the allomorphic variations described in Section 2 are obligatorily found in the context of special focus.

what remains puzzzling

The special neediness of Verum Focus – Höhle (1992), on German, Huidobro (2005) on Argentinian Spanish, Dořák & Gergel (2004), Dořák (2007) on Slovenian.

7 Incorporation, Special Focus and Ellipsis

Two observations define the interaction between Responsive Ellipsis and the mechanisms we have been concerned with here. The first is that simple pronouns are like subjects in general in not surviving ellipsis (Wagner (1959: 98, §276), McCloskey (1991)):

(33) a. An bhfuil sé breoite?
        Q be.PRES he ill
        'Is he ill?'
     b. Tá   (*sé).
        be.PRES he
        'He is.'

The second observation, apparently at odds with the first, is that in the context of special focus, the accented simple pronoun does survive ellipsis. We see this especially under Verum Focus, in which the SFC is accompanied by Responsive Ellipsis very frequently indeed.

(34) a. Amharc   orm.
        look .IMPERV on-me
        'Look at me.
     b. Eh? Amharc ort?   Nach bhfuil **MÉ**?
            look   on-you NEGQ be .PRES I?
        'Eh? Look at you? I **AM**. (Am I NOT?)'   RNG 26-5-08

(35) Ar   shíl   tú ariamh go mbeadh sé i nDáil Éireann? Níor
     Q-[PAST] think [PAST] you ever   c be .COND he in Parliament   NEG.PAST
     shíl,   leoga; níor   shíl   **MÉ**
     think [PAST] indeed neg.past think .PAST I
     'Did you ever think that he'd be in Parliament? Indeed I didn't. I did not.'   RNG
     29-11-10

(36) a. Cén aois anois tú, a   Shéamais?
        what age now   you VOC Jim
        'How old are you now, Jim?'
     b. Tá   mé ag tarraingt ar na trí   scór, a   Rónáin.
        be .PRES I draw PROG   on the three score VOC
        'I'm almost sixty, Rónán.
     c. Níl   **TÚ**.
        NEG-be-.PRES you
        'You are not!'   (radio interview)

(37) a. Mar sin ní   raibh   tú ag iarraidh jobannaí a chur   i mbaol?
        like that NEG be.PAST you PROG try   jobs   put.NON-FIN in danger
        'So you weren't trying to jeopardize jobs?'
     b. Ó, ní   raibh MÉ; ní   raibh MÉ!
           NEG be.PAST I   NEG be.PAST I
        'Oh I was NOT; I was NOT!'   RNG 20-03-2005

This is strange in at least three ways:
- In general subjects can't survive ellipsis (see for instance Wagner (1959: p. 98, §276)).
- In semantic-pragmatic terms, the pronouns are given and are therefore ripe for elimination under ellipsis.

EVEN EXPLETIVE (SEMANTICALLY EMPTY) SUBJECTS

(38) An gcuireann sé iontas   ort   anois gur fágadh   ceithre mhí gan
     Q put   it wonder on-you now   c   leave .PAST-IMPERS four   month without
     an obair seo   a dhéanamh? Ó cuireann **SÉ** dáiríre.
     the work DEMON do .NON-FIN   puts   it seriously
     'Does it surprise you that this work was left four months without being finished? Oh,
     it really does.'   RNG 6-8-2012

(39) Agus an gcuireann sé as duit   an méid sin má bíonn   siad amuigh ar an
     and Q put   it out to-you that-much if be .PRES-HABIT they out   on the
     bhfarraige? Cuireann **SÉ**, mar tá áilleacht na háite le bheith   millte   go deo.
     ocean   puts   it   for is beauty   the place to be .NON-FIN destroyed forever
     'Does it bother you that much if they are out on the ocean? It does, for the beauty of
     the place is to be destroyed for all time.'   RNG 27-11-2012

CLEAR CONCLUSION: It cannot be that the subject survives elision in these cases for semantic reasons.

It seems clear, rather, that the pronoun survives because it is needed to provide prosodic suppprt for the expression of the focal accent.

What then *is* the basis for the exceptional treatment of simple pronouns in (34)–(39)? We argue here that the crucial factor is prosodic and that, as in much of the empirical material we have dealt with here, SPI is the central actor. in what follows.

In adjoining a subject pronoun to the inflected verb, SPI lifts it out of the ellipsis site:

(40)   SPI:
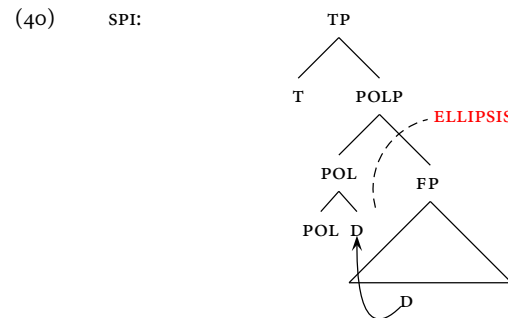
The question, then, of whether or not the subject pronoun 'survives ellipsis' is naturally construed as the question of how SPI interacts with ellipsis. That interaction can now be encapsulated in two generalizations:

(41)   GENERALIZATION A: Despite being obligatory in general, SPI does not apply in the
                           context of Responsive Ellipsis.
       GENERALIZATION B: But SPI may apply out of an ellipsis site if the subject pronoun
                           is destined to bear a focal accent in the Special Focus Construc-
                           tion.

Assume that Merchant's E-feature has the effect of placing on all terminal elements within the targeted constituent a marker which instructs the phonology to provide no output form for that terminal (for related discussion, see Rudin (2015)).

Assume two ranked and variable constraints active in the phonological (post-syntactic and post-morphological)) computation:

CONSTRAINT ONE: Assign a violation mark for every DEL-marked item in the output form.

CONSTRAINT TWO: Realize Verum Focus.

Assume that CONSTRAINT TWO outranks CONSTRAINT ONE.

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