Nominal Predicates and Absolutive Case Marking in Irish*

Andrew Carnie

0. Introduction

In most recent work on the derivation of various word orders in the Minimalist framework (Chomsky 1992, Bobaljik and Carnie 1992, Jonas and Bobaljik 1992 etc.), the primary source of data has come from clauses with tensed and tenseless verbs. In this paper, I will explore the evidence from non-verbal predicates, specifically from Modern Irish. These constructions are problematic for both word order derivation and case theory. I will argue that Irish Nominal Predicates, surprisingly in a nominative/accusative language, show absolutive case marking on their subjects. I will attempt to provide an account of these sentences in a slightly modified version of Chomsky’s minimalist program where Bobaljik’s (1993) Obligatory Case Parameter is expanded to allow language internal variation based on aspect and tense features. I will also argue that there is evidence of head movement of complex phrasal categories in Irish, suggesting that complex predicates incorporate before head-movement. This conclusion will be borne out by data from extraction phenomena. The paper is structured as follows. In section 1, I will provide a brief description of the minimalist program, and how Irish VSO order can be derived in this system, and explain the notion of Active and Inert AgrPs. In section 2, I will discuss the structure of Irish clauses with nominal predicates, and show how the nominal predicate behaves like a verb with respect to headmovement. I will also show how subjects with nominal predicates take an absolutive case marking. Finally, in Section 3, I will extend the analysis presented in section 2 to clauses with

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definite predicates, complex phrasal predicates, and the focus construction. I will also attempt an account of some problematic binding phenomena.

1. **The Minimalist Program**

1.1 **The Minimalist Program and VSO word order.**

Over the last half-decade, much work in syntax has been devoted to motivating and supporting the claim that all arguments of a verb, and in particular the subject, are base-generated within the maximal projection (VP) of that verb (the VP-internal-subject hypothesis: cf. e.g., Fukui & Speas 1986, Kitagawa 1986, Koopman & Sportiche 1988 among many others). This approach entails that in a language such as English, the subject must “raise” to somewhere within the maximal projection of an inflectional category to receive (abstract) nominative Case.

Extending a proposal by Pollock (1989), Chomsky (1989, 1991 etc.) has suggested that both structural cases (i.e. nominative and accusative) are realized in a parallel manner— that is— via movement (either overt: before “Spell Out” (formerly Surface Structure), or covert: at Logical Form (LF), the semantic component) of the arguments to positions within the inflectional complex. Specifically, it is suggested that all structural case and agreement is the realization of a specifier/head relationship with an appropriate functional (Agr) head. Thus the inflectional complex includes a Tense Phrase (TP), and two (non-distinct) agreement phrases (AgrS, AgrO) (1).

\[ \text{AGRSP} \quad \text{[AgrS [TP [T [AGR [AgrO [VP Subject [V Object]]]]]]]} \]

While some (or all) movement may be at LF ("covert"), the verb must eventually raise to AgrS, adjoining to each of the intervening head positions (via Head-to-Head movement (Travis 1984)). NPs must receive case, so all arguments must raise to the specifier position (i.e. the empty position which is sister to the single bar projection of the head) of one of the agreement phrases (AgrPs) at some point in the derivation. Movement is motivated by the presence of inflectional features on the head which must be checked against the features in the inflectional complex.

Since the agreement heads are non-distinct\(^2\), the case with which each is associated is determined by the nature of the element which adjoins to it. Thus the objective (or accusative case), being in some sense a verbal attribute, must

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1 Most of this section is a revised version of Bobaljik and Carnie (1992) and Carnie and Bobaljik (1993). It has benefited greatly from the insights and work of Jonathan Bobaljik and he deserves large credit for the work seen here.

2 In this framework, they are only a collection of relevant φ-features such as person, number, and gender.
be realized in the specifier/head relationship with the complex head \([V, \text{Agr}O]\) derived via the first step of the Head-to-Head Movement.

2. **ACCUSATIVE CASE:**

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{AgrOP} \\
&\quad \downarrow \\
&\quad \text{obj}_i \\
&\quad \downarrow \\
&\quad \text{AgrO'} \\
&\quad \downarrow \\
&\quad [V, +\text{AgrO}] \\
&\quad \downarrow \\
&\quad \text{VP} \\
&\quad \downarrow \\
&\quad V' \\
&\quad \downarrow \\
&\quad t_j \\
&\quad \downarrow \\
&\quad t_i
\end{align*}
\]

By similar logic, Head-Movement of Tense (T) to AgrS will create the complex head \([T, \text{AgrS}]\) and nominative case will be realized in a specifier/head relationship to this head when T is finite.

3. **NOMINATIVE CASE**

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{AgrSP} \\
&\quad \downarrow \\
&\quad \text{Subj} \\
&\quad \downarrow \\
&\quad \text{AgrS'} \\
&\quad \downarrow \\
&\quad [T_i, +\text{AgrS}] \\
&\quad \downarrow \\
&\quad \text{TP} \\
&\quad \downarrow \\
&\quad T' \\
&\quad \downarrow \\
&\quad t_i \\
&\quad \downarrow \\
&\quad \ldots
\end{align*}
\]

Within the bounds of this approach, there are a number of possible derivations which will result in a surface VSO word order. The first possibility is that the verb (or verbal complex) has "fronted" to an initial complementizer (Comp) position, in which case the surface positions of the subject and object are not \textit{a priori} evident. This is the analysis presented in Sproat (1985) and discussed in Chomsky (1992). McCloskey (1992), using evidence from adverb placement, shows that the raised verb can be no higher than the left edge of the inflectional complex. For this reason, I will assume that the raising to Comp analysis is
incorrect. Instead, I will claim that tensed V raises overtly to AgrS\(^3\), but that the subject raises only as far as specifier of the Tense Phrase.

The question now arises as to why the subject would raise only to the specifier of TP, when its case position is higher in the specifier AgrS. For the answer to this, I turn to the phenomenon of object shift. The raising of an object across the (trace of) the subject in its base position, the specifier of VP, would appear to be in violation of some version of Relativized Minimality (Rizzi 1990). The solution proposed by Chomsky (1992) is that Minimality is expressed as an Economy condition on movement such that the target must be the closest relevant landing site. The notion of closest, however, is mediated by a notion of *Equidistance* whereby more than one position may count as the closest position. Adopting the definition in Bobaljik (1993)\(^4\), relative to the head X in the structure below, ZP and WP are Equidistant from elements c-commanded by X. The operative intuition is that ZP is the specifier of X, and WP the specifier of the complement of X, both local\(^5\) relations to the head X.

\[\ldots\text{XP}\]
\[\text{ZP}\]
\[\text{X}\]
\[\text{YP}\]
\[\text{WP}\]
\[\ldots\]

The effect of this is that NP movement may (although need not) “skip” at most one specifier position, but only if the target is the specifier of the next higher phrase. For the case of object shift, this entails that the object may skip the subject in the specifier of VP and raise to specifier of AgrO without violating Relativized Minimality *qua* Shortest Movement. On the assumption that movement is further constrained by the Strict Cycle Condition, object shift will have to precede raising of the subject. After the object has raised to the specifier of AgrO, the subject will then have to skip this raised object. Examining the structure in (1), we see that the subject cannot raise directly to specifier of AgrS as this position is farther than the specifier of AgrO, even with the effects of Equidistance. Even if the specifier of TP was not present, the specifiers of AgrS and AgrO are not in the relevant local relation (4) to any given head, and thus

\[^{3}\] More exactly, raising is: V to AgrO; AgrO to T, T to AgrS.

\[^{4}\] This differs from the earlier formulations in that verb raising is not taken to be a condition on Equidistance.

\[^{5}\] The notion as given here is intuitive rather than formal. In Chomsky’s formalism the relation between X and WP is not a local one unless the head of YP has incorporated into X. Given Kayne’s (1993) proposal that all languages are Spec-Head-Complement ordered, we might abandon Chomsky’s requirement in favour of one of linear adjacency. X and XP are linearly adjacent, thus the relation is strictly local.
are not equidistant from, e.g. the subject. The result is that the subject may only skip the filled specifier of AgrO if it raises (minimally) to the specifier of TP first.

In an interesting way, then, overt object shift can be taken as a diagnostic for the licensing of the specifier of TP (at PF) as a subject position in a given language. As will be seen below, Irish has overt raising of (at least some) objects to specifier of AgrO, hence Irish licenses the specifier of TP at s-structure as an A-position to (or through) which the subject may raise. Given this we can derive VSO order by having the verb in AgrS, the object in the specifier of AgrO and the subject in the specifier of TP, when a language has overt object shift:

5. \[\text{AGRSP} [\text{AgrS} + T + V + \text{AgrO}]_i \text{ [TP Subj [t_i [\text{AGROP} \text{Obj}_k [u [\text{VP} j_{t_k} i_{t_k}]]]]]]}\]

Now that we have determined that when a language has object shift, the subject’s first landing site is TP, we still have to ask why the subject does not have to raise further to its case position in specifier of AgrS. The answer is not complex. Recall that an assumption of the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1992) is that overt movement is legitimate only in case that without such movement, morphological features would not be checked and there would be no legitimate interpretation at PF or at LF. This is the Economy principle of Procrastinate (Chomsky 1992). It is a simple move to assume since the subject must move through specifier of TP, and if nominative case features are a reflex of T, then further (overt) raising to the specifier of AgrS would be superfluous. Overt

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6 The specifier of TP is not necessary if object shift is not overt. Presumably, specifiers are generated during the course of a derivation as they are targetted for movement or by virtue of material being base-generated in them. Thus, if Spec, AgrO is not filled, it is not present and does not count as the closest position. There is no contradiction here: only filled specifiers count for determining which specifier must count as the closest position, hence the subject may raise as far as it pleases if there are no intervening filled specifiers, while equidistance is defined structurally in terms of heads, and only two consecutive specifier positions (present or potential) will ever be in the configuration above See Jonas & Bobaljik (1993).

7 What I have not dealt with here in this brief summary is to explain why there is any overt movement of any of the NPs at all. Let us assume, that since there is overt object in Irish that NPs must check their case before SPELLOUT. Objects do this in the specifier of [AGR V], Subjects can do this in the specifier of TP.

8 A similar scenario has been proposed for the Germanic languages which allow object shift by Bobaljik & Jonas (1993). Following Diesing (1990 et seq.), it is observed that the Germanic languages which allow overt raising of object NPs to the specifier of AgrO also to have two overt positions in which subjects may occur. Contra Diesing, it is shown that both of these subject positions are external to the VP, i.e. the specifier of TP and the specifier of AgrS. Further, it is definite and specific NPs which raise to the higher position, presumably due to some further morphological requirement that definiteness
raising of the subject further to the specifier of AgrS, as is found in French and English, is thus not the null option and will require some extra motivation, such as the proposals in Chomsky (1992). In section 1.2, I will show that Irish has overt object shift, thus its VSO order can be derived in the way described above.

1.2 Modern Irish and Object Shift

Finite clauses in Modern Irish display the basic order (Comp)-Verb-Subject-Object followed by any obliques and adverbs (6)\(^9\). In particular, the sequence of VSO may not be interrupted by any elements, including adverbials\(^{10}\). This order is generally taken to reflect an underlying SVO order (as shown by progressive sentences (like 6 below) and Munster infinitivals (9b below)) with raising of at least the verb to some VP-external functional projection (McCloskey 1983, 1992, Sproat 1985, Guilfoyle 1990, Bobaljik & Carnie 1992).

6. Leamann an t-aímní an bhriathair in Gaeilge follow.PRES the subject the verb in Irish
   ‘The subject follows the verb in Irish’

7. Tá an teangeolaí ag ól na beorach be.PRES the linguist PROG drink.DVN the beer
   ‘The linguist is drinking the beer’

There is strong evidence for object raising in Irish, at least in non-finite clauses. In all dialects an OV order is available. In the northern dialects (Ulster and Connacht), and the standard dialect, the only order of a non-finite transitive clause is SOV\(^{11}\) (7). When there is an overt object NP or pronoun, the non-finite

induces. Indefinites in Icelandic, German and other such languages, like all subjects in Irish, remain in the specifier of TP at s-structure, and are prohibited from moving farther by the principle of Procrastinate.

9 I ignore the process known as Narrative Inversion, found only in the Narrative Register, which fronts some constituent to clause-initial position. We also ignore the postponing of object pronouns in tensed clauses. While these add complications to any analysis, neither process contradicts anything said in the text. See McCloskey (1992) for an analysis of the former process.

10 A few exceptions such as cinnite “certainly” and ar nadoigh “of course” aside

11 The verb (V) in a non-finite clause is called in traditional grammars a “Verbal Noun”. Morphologically, it has both nominal and verbal properties, much as gerunds or participles cross-linguistically. We will have nothing to say about it here. See, among others, Guilfoyle (1993, 1991). Duffield (1990a, 1990b, 1991)
verb is preceded by the transitive particle *a*\textsuperscript{12}. Note that both the subject and object are marked accusative\textsuperscript{13}.

8. \[ \text{Ba mhaith liom \[ CP \; \text{Seán} \; \text{an abairt} \; \text{a scriobh} \]} \]
\[ \text{COP} \; \text{good} \; \text{with} \; \text{I.S} \; \text{John.ACC the sentence.ACC TRAN write} \]
\[ \text{I want John to write the sentence} \]
\[ \text{S O V} \]

In the southern dialect (Munster), however, there are two options for transitive infinitival clauses with overt objects. In general, the subject is PRO, and the object occurs preverbally with accusative case (9a). A more marked option is for the object to appear postverbally in the genitive case (9b), this option is available only with an overt subject (which takes accusative case). In either case, the “transitive” particle *a* is present also.

9. Southern: Munster

a. \[ \text{Ba mhaith liom \[ \text{PRO; an abairt} \; \text{a scriobh} \]} \]
\[ \text{COP} \; \text{good} \; \text{with} \; \text{I.S} \; \text{the sentence.ACC TRAN write} \]
\[ \text{I want to write the sentence} \]
\[ \text{PRO O V} \]

b. \[ \text{Ba mhaith liom \[ \text{CP \; Seán} \; \text{a scriobhna habairte} \]} \]
\[ \text{COP} \; \text{good} \; \text{with} \; \text{I.S} \; \text{John.ACC TRAN write the sentence.GEN} \]
\[ \text{I want John to write the sentence} \]
\[ \text{S V O gen} \]
\[ \text{[not fully productive]} \]

There is thus a structural position to the left of the verb in which accusative case features are checked. If Irish is underlingly SVO (McCloskey 1983, Bobaljik and Carnie 1993) then this position must be a chained position, one to which the object has shifted\textsuperscript{14}. I will assume that this position is the specifier of AgrO (1). (Duffield 1990) Note that the subject occurs to the left even of these shifted objects and must therefore be higher than AgrOP. Given these facts, then it is natural to assume that Irish has overt object shift. Since Irish has object shift, it must therefore license the specifier of TP as a subject position. Let us assume then that Irish follows the unmarked case and does not have further motivation for NP movement to the specifier of AgrS. This derives VSO word order. Consider the following Derivation. The head movement of the verb is thus as follows:

\[
[ \text{AgrSP} \Join \text{AgrS} \Join \text{TP} \Join [ \text{AgrOP} \Join \text{AgrO} \Join \text{VP} ] ]
\]

10. 

\[ \text{This particle also surfaces as \textit{do} in some dialects and registers.}\]

\[ \text{Full NPs, like those in the examples below, do not show a morphological distinction between nominative and accusative cases. However, pronouns do.}\]

\[ \text{See Guilfoyle (1993) also Ramchand (1993) for Scots Gaelic. They propose that the derived position is the specifier of AspectP.}\]
NP movement is:

\[ [\text{AgrS}] \rightarrow [\text{T}] \rightarrow [\text{Agr0}] \]

11.

Without further comment, this accounts for the word order in tensed transitive clauses of Modern Irish (12).

12. \[ [\text{AgrSP}] [\text{AgrS}+[\text{Agr}+\text{T}]+\text{Agr0}+\text{V}]_{\text{i TP}} \text{ subj} [\text{t} ; [\text{Agr0} \text{ obj} \text{m} [\text{Agr0} ; \text{ti} \text{ VP} [\text{t} [\text{V} ; \text{ti} \text{ t_m}]]]]]]]]

1.3 Intransitives

There is one issue which remains to be discussed with respect to deriving Irish word order: that of case marking in intransitive clauses. We must ask ourselves why subjects of intransitives in English and Irish are marked with nominative case (ending up in the specifier of AgrSP) rather than stopping in the lower (closer) AgrOP specifier and taking accusative case. Chomsky (1992) rephrases the Extended Projection Principle in terms of Active and Inert (inactive) Agreement. Chomsky proposes that a language identifies one Agr node as “active” when only one NP is present: For nominative/accusative languages like English, he proposes that the active Agr is AgrS. In Bobaljik (1993) this choice is phrased in terms of the Obligatory Case Parameter.

Since at some level, the verb will raise through both Agr phrases, without the active/inactive distinction, both specifiers are predicted to be available as case positions for subject NPs. This prediction is obviously false. This is seen in the following sentences. Sentence (13) shows that subjects may not appear in accusative case position.

13. a. * Smiled him  
   b. * Slept her  
   c. * arrived him

---

15 To simplify representations, I will simply omit inactive AgrPs from representations. This is consistent with Chomsky’s view of them.

16 Given that I have argued that subjects don’t have to raise to AgrS, and can satisfy case checking in TP, a more coherent notion of the OCP is that either T or V is active. The active/inert status of the actual Agr node is inherited from the head that raises to it.
Similarly, we can show that not only must subjects in English show up in Nominative position, but that intransitives cannot assign any accusative case at all. This is seen in (14), where unergative sentences cannot have an expletive object. ((14a&b) should be taken with the experiencer reading on the subject):

14. a. * John smiled it
    b. * Susan slept it
    c. * John arrived it

Since Irish generally shows nominative/accusative case marking, it is natural to assume that for Irish the Obligatory Case Parameter is set to AgrS. We will see below, however, that there are sentences of Irish which behave as if it is AgrO which is active. This will argue for a revision of the Obligatory Case Parameter, such that it is not a simple binary choice.

1.4 Section summary

I claim that VSO order follows directly when a language has overt verb raising to the highest inflectional projection and has object shift. Under the Minimalist framework, the specifier of TP may be licensed as a position in which to check nominative case in all languages which have object shift, due to the economy principle of shortest movement. When the subject is in the specifier of TP, and the verb is incorporated into the AgrS head, then VSO order trivially follows. In sentences with a single argument, the correct (nominative) case marking follows from the active/inert distinction among Agrs.

In the section that follows, I will explore the structure of Irish sentences without verbal predicates and see if they behave in a similar manner to the basic VSO sentences discussed in this section.
2. Modern Irish Nominal Predicates

In this section, I will explore the structure of the nominal predicate system of Modern Irish. In Section 2.1 I will explore the different types of “be” in Irish. In section 2.2, I will show that the morpheme “is” is a tense morpheme rather than a verb. Finally, in section 2.3, I will show that the appropriate account Irish Nominal predicates involves the head raising of the noun, and an active AgRO node.

2.1 Be in Irish: Tá vs. Is.

Like Spanish and many other languages, Irish has two constructions which roughly mean “Be” in English. These are tá (or br) and Is. Tá is known in the prescriptive grammars as ‘substantive be’. Is on the other hand is known as ‘copular be’. I will avoid this nomenclature where possible, since strictly speaking, both are copular in nature. I will use the Irish words tá and is instead. Examples of these two constructions are seen below in (15).

15. a. Tá sé mó
   Be.pres he big
   “he is big”

   b. Is amadán Seán
   cop fool John
   “John is a fool”

Following Doherty (1992), Alqvist (1972) and ó Sé (1990), I will attempt to show that Tá is a fully inflected auxiliary verb, whereas Is is simply a tense morpheme showing up on non-verbal predicates. Contra Doherty (1992), however, I hope to show that the choice of which verb can be used when cannot be derived directly from the stage-level/individual level predicate distinctions of Carlson (1977), but follows from which predicates may bear tense features.

Let us start by examining where each construction appears. Tá appears with all types of predicates except nouns. Examples of Tá with various types of predicates are seen below in (16):

16. a. Tá sé már
   Be.pres he big
   “he is big”

   b. Tá Seán go maith
   be.pres John adv well
   “John is well”

---

17 I will however, gloss Is as “cop” and Tá as “be”.
18 See below for an exception to this generalization.
c. Tá Seán i mBaile Átha Claith
   *be.pres J in Dublin
   “John is in Dublin”

d. Tá Seán ag rith
   *be.pres J prog run.dyn
   “John is running”

(verb- with progressive)

e. Bhí an obair déanta
   *be.pres the work done.dva
   “The work was done”

(verb-with passive/perfective)

f. * Tá sé dochtúir
   *be.pres he doctor
   “He is a doctor”

(*NP)

Is, on the other hand, is found most productively with nominal predicates 19.

17. Is dochtúir mé
    *Cop doctor me
    “I am a doctor”

(NPs --- Productive)

It is not generally found with adjectives (18) or prepositions (19) and is never found with verbal participles(20) 20

18. * Is cliste iad
    *Cop clever them
    “they are clever”

(*adj)

19. * Is i nDaoire Scán
    *Cop in Derry
    “*John is in Derry”

(*PP)

20. * Is ag rith é
    cop prog run him
    “he is running”

(*Verb)
Doherty (1992) notes that there is a set of exceptions to the generalization that no adjectives or prepositional phrases may appear as predicates with *ls*. The following lexically specified set of adjectives is found with *ls*:

21. \[ \begin{array}{cccc}
\text{fiú} & \text{worthwhile} & \text{fior} & \text{true} \\
\text{maith} & \text{good} & \text{olc} & \text{evil} \\
\text{aisteach} & \text{odd} & \text{iontach} & \text{wonderful} \\
\text{ceart} & \text{right} & \text{cóir} & \text{just} \\
\text{leor} & \text{sufficient} & \text{mór} & \text{big} \\
\text{beag} & \text{small} & \text{fuar} & \text{cold} \\
\text{gruama} & \text{gloomy} & \text{cosúil} & \text{similar} \\
\text{ionann} & \text{equivalent} & \text{greannmhár} & \text{funny} \\
\text{mall} & \text{slow} & & \\
\end{array} \]

(from Doherty (1992))

This is seen in the following example taken from Doherty (1992)

22. Máis ceart mo chuimhne (from Doherty 1992)
   *If my memory is right*

Similarly, there is a set of exceptional PP predicates which may appear with *ls*. These are seen in (23)

23. 
   \[ \begin{array}{c}
   \text{de} & \text{"of"} & \text{(meaning origin)} \\
   \text{as} & \text{"out of"} & \text{(meaning origin)} \\
   \text{ó} & \text{"from"} & \text{(meaning origin)} \\
   \text{le} & \text{"with"} & \text{(indicating possession)} \\
   \end{array} \]

Examples of these are seen below:

24. a. Is de bhunadh Phroistínach í
cop of stock Protestant her
   "She is of Protestant stock" (from Doherty 1992)

b. Is as Inish Eoghan é
cop out-of Inish Owen him
   "He is from Inish Owen" (from Doherty 1992)

c. Is ó Bhaile Átha Cliath iad
cop from Dublin them
   "They are from Dublin" (from Doherty 1992)

---

21. Ó Siadhail (1983) notes that many of these exceptions are falling out of use in favour of *Tá*. In Old Irish all adjectives were found with the Copula, and never with *Tá* (Oír. *aíthe*). During the Middle Irish period, usage shifted and only nominal predicates were found with *ls*. Ó Máille (1912), Thurneysen (1980), Dillon (1927/28)
We can conclude then that Tá is allowed with all Predicates except nominal ones, and that Is is found with all types of predicates except verbal ones, but is only productively found with Nominal predicates. This is summarized in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tá</th>
<th>Is</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NP</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>productive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADJ</td>
<td>productive</td>
<td>closed class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>productive</td>
<td>closed class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VP</td>
<td>productive</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at this evidence, Doherty (1992) notes that the predicates found with Is all correspond to the class identified by Carlson (1977) as Individual Level predicates. Carlson claims that all predicates have readings of one of two types. The first is the Individual level, which are permanent and stable properties of an individual. The other are stage level readings, where the predicate identifies a temporary property of the individual or object in question. Kratzer (1989) extends this proposal by claiming that stage level predicates have a Davidsonian argument (here represented as L) which marks the predication in Temporal and Spatial location. Individual level Predicates lack this property. Doherty (1992) claims that the distribution of Is and Tá is elegantly accounted for with this approach. Individual level predicates appear with Is, stage level ones appear with Tá. There is some empirical evidence in favour of such an approach. Consider the following English sentence:

26. John was a doctor.

This sentence is ambiguous between two readings. Under one reading (the individual level), being a doctor was a permanent property of John. The past tense here suggests that John is no longer alive. The other reading (the stage level), John’s doctoring was a temporary thing. John is no longer a doctor, but he is still alive—perhaps he lost his license to practice. These two readings are represented in Kratzer’s terms in (38):

27. a. PAST [doctor'(John)] Individual level
    b. ($L)[$PAST(L) & doctor'(John,L)] Stage level

---

22 In fact Carlson discusses a third type: that of “kind” only Individual and Stage are relevant here, however.

23 A similar distinction is claimed to exist with Spanish ser and estar.
Now let's consider the equivalent Irish sentence using the morpheme *Is*:

28. \[ \text{Ba dhochtúir é} \]
    \[ \text{Cop.past doctor him} \]
    \[ \text{"he was a doctor"} \]

Interestingly, this sentence can only have the reading in (27a), the individual level reading. The reading in (27b) is excluded. To get the reading in (27b) a different construction using *Tá*, and the morpheme *i’hin*24 must be used. This is seen in (29) where the phrase “but isn’t licensed now” is used to force a stage level reading.

29. \[ \text{Bhí Seán ina dhochtúir (ach níl díolúine aige anois)} \]
    \[ \text{Be.past J in.his doctor (but be.not license at.3.s now)} \]
    \[ \text{"John was a doctor (but he doesn’t have a license now)"} \]
    \[ \text{can only have the reading of (27b)} \]

The corresponding sentence with *Is* is ungrammatical

30. * \[ \text{Ba dhochtúir é (ach níl díolúine aige anois)} \]
    \[ \text{"He was a doctor but now he doesn’t have a license"} \]

Given this, then, there seems to be strong evidence in favor of Doherty’s proposals that the *Is/Tá* distinction is one of stage versus individual level. Unfortunately, this proposal does not stand up under strong scrutiny.

There are a large number of individual level predicates that not only show up with *Tá*, but cannot show up with *Is*. Consider for example the following two sentences.

31. a. \[ \text{Bhí sé clíste} \]
    \[ \text{be.past he clever} \]
    \[ \text{"He was clever"} \]

    b. \[ \text{Bfónn madraí ag amhastrach} \]
    \[ \text{be.habitual dogs prog bark} \]
    \[ \text{"Dogs bark"} \]

(31a) is ambiguous between a stage-level and an individual level predicate, but the individual level reading is allowed with *Tá* (showing up here as *Bhí*). In fact, the corresponding sentence with *Is* is ungrammatical:

32. * \[ \text{Ba Chliste é} \]
    \[ \text{cop.past clever him} \]
    \[ \text{"He was clever (before he died)"} \]

---

24 David Cram (1983) has analyzed the corresponding Scots Gaelic morpheme *ann* as the stative aspect particle, such an analysis could be used here.
The sentence in (31b) on the other hand can only have an individual level reading, but still shows up with the verb Tá.

It thus follows then that while it is true that all predicates found with Is are individual level predicates, it is not true that all individual level predicates are predicates found with Is. Since we are asking what the difference between an Is predicate and a Tá one is, we cannot reduce the solution to individual/stage level (contra Doherty 1992). There is no way to predict (with the exception of nouns) whether a predicate is found with “is” or not based upon its reading as an individual or stage level predicate. The difference then must follow from another source. I will claim that this difference is a lexical one, and follows from which inflectional features are found on the predicate head. This will be pursued later in this paper. First, however, I will turn to the issue of the categorial status of Is.

2.2 IS is not a verb

In this section, I will explore the categorial status of the morpheme Is. I will claim, again after Doherty (1992) and Alqvist (1972), that Is is not a verb, but rather a tense and mood particle. The strongest evidence for this claim is a syntactic one. There is an obvious difference in word order and case assignment between Is and normal sentences with tensed verbs. Irish has a set of pre-verbal particles, these particles appear first in the sentence always immediately preceding the verb.

33. Níor thog Sean an teach
    Neg.past build J the house
    “John did not build the house”

It is my contention that Is and its allomorphs are simply the forms of the these preverbal particles that appear on non-verbal predicates. This is confirmed by the fact that syntactically, if we assume Is is a particle, nominal predicates appear structurally in the same position as tensed verbs:

34. a. Is + Predicate + subject

    b. Particle Predicate
       [Níor rith] sé
       neg.past run he
       “he did not run”

    c. Particle Predicate
       [Níor dochtúir] é
       Neg.past doctor him
       “He was not a doctor”

The word order for both types is that found in (34a): the Particle is immediately followed by the predicate, which in turn is followed by the subject. If we were to
assume that * is a verb, then we would not only lose this generalization, but we would also be at a loss to explain the variety of word orders found in “Be” sentences. In sentences with the verb Tá, the word order is:

35. a. Particle + Tá + subject + Predicate
b. Ní raibh mé sásta
   Neg Be.past I satisfied
   “I was not satisfied”

If * is were to function like a true auxiliary (like Tá), then the same word order would be predicted to be found here. This is false:

36. * Ní mé dochtúir
   Cop.neg I doctor
   “I am not a doctor”

We thus have some fairly strong evidence that * is functioning like a preverbal particle on Nominal predicates which appear in sentence initial position. There is a plethora of supporting evidence for this claim.

First, we have some weak morphological evidence that these morphemes are at least loosely related to the preverbal particles. This is seen in the following table

37.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unembedded (without Comp)</th>
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<td>Decl</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>Neg</td>
<td>N,Q</td>
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<td>Q</td>
<td>Neg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copula</td>
<td>Ba^L</td>
<td>Ar</td>
<td>Níor</td>
<td>Nár</td>
<td>Is</td>
<td>an/ab</td>
<td>Ní</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particle</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Ar</td>
<td>Níor</td>
<td>Nár</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>an^N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Embedded (with Comp)</th>
<th></th>
<th>NonPast</th>
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<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Neg</td>
<td>Decl</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copula</td>
<td>gur^L</td>
<td>nár</td>
<td>gur</td>
<td>nach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particle</td>
<td>gur</td>
<td>nach</td>
<td>go</td>
<td>má?</td>
<td>nach^N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* An old past-tense particle “do” is sometimes still seen in the written language
L= form that lenites, N= form that nasalizes the following word

This of course, is not in anyway conclusive, but it is suggestive. However, the fact that * is cannot cooccur with any of these particles is stronger evidence:

38. * Ní is amadan é
   Neg.pres cop fool him
   “He is not a fool”
Instead of taking a particle, the copula shows the mood, questionhood and negation directly:

39. \[ \text{Nf amadán é} \]
    \[ \text{cop.neg.pres fool him} \]
    \[ \text{"He is not a fool"} \]

This is behavior that would be expected of a particle, but not of a verb.

Further evidence that \textit{ís} is not a verb comes from the inflectional facts of Irish verbs. In Irish, verbs are inflected for a full range of tenses and moods, past, present, future, conditional and subjunctive. The copula is not; it only has a present/past distinction.

40. \begin{align*}
    \text{Present/Future} & \quad \text{Past/conditional} \\
    \text{ís} & \quad \text{ba}
\end{align*}

This is a feature that \textit{ís} shares with the preverbal particles. Preverbal particles also only show a past/non-past distinction. Similar facts are found with respect to agreement phenomena in Irish. In all dialects of the language, certain person/number combinations in certain tenses allow an optional Pro-drop agreement pattern (cf. McCloskey and Hale (1984) for more discussion). Take for example the pattern seen with the verb \textit{Tá}. Two options are available. Either the inflected verb may surface with no overt pronoun (41a), or a verb with no overt agreement may surface with an overt pronoun (41b):

41. a. \text{Táim pro} \quad \text{"I am"} \\
    b. \text{Tá mé} \quad \text{"I am"}

These patterns are productive throughout the verbal system of Irish. They are never found, however, with \textit{ís}.\textsuperscript{25}

42. \* \text{Isim} \quad \text{"I am"}

There is also considerable phonological evidence that \textit{ís} and its allomorphs are particles rather than verbs. Firstly, unlike verbs (43c\&d) it may delete freely in fast speech as shown in (43a\&b)

43. a. \text{Is dochtúir é} \quad \text{cop doctor him} \\
    \text{"He is a doctor"} \\
    b. \text{dochtúir é} \quad \text{doctor him} \\
    \text{"He is a doctor"}

\textsuperscript{25} This is not true of Old Irish. Old Irish had a fully inflected paradigm for \textit{ís}. (Thurneysen 1980, Ó Máille 1912, Dillon 1927/28)
c. Tá sé mór
   *be he big
   "He is big"

d. * sé mór
   he big
   "he is big"

In many respects, the Is morphemes behave like preverbal particles in that they form a proclitic with the predicate that follows them. For example, the underlying /s/ of the Is morpheme will palatalize to /S/ before a high front vowel. Normally, such palatalization is restricted to phonological domains smaller than the word level.

44. Is é an é /is e:n e:/ → [Se:n e:]
   cop bird him
   "he is a bird"

Similar evidence comes from ellipsis phenomena. Like an other proclitics, the Is morpheme requires some phonological support to its right. Modern Irish, has no words for yes or no. Instead, the appropriate response to a yes/no question is the appropriately negated or affirmative form of the verb, with the rest of the sentence elided (McCloskey 1991, Doherty 1992):

45. An bhfuil tú tinn? Tá.
   Q be.pres you sick. Am (yes)
   "Are you sick? Yes"

This is not true of Is. Is cannot stand on its own. At the very least it requires the meaningless pronoun ea, if not the predicate itself, for phonological support.

46. a. An dochtúir tú? Is ea/ *Is
    Q doctor you cop φ/*cop
    "Are you a doctor" "yes"

b. An leatsa an Chevy? Ni liomsa/*Ní
    Q with.2.s.emp the Chevy? Cop.neg with.1.s.emp
    "Is that your Chevy?" "No"
    (Lit: Is with-you the Chevy?)
Evidence from adverb placement also supports the theory that *is* is a proclitic particle. *Cinnte* "certainly" can be placed after a lexical verb and the subject when that subject is a full NP.26

47. Bhí, cinnte, Seán tinn
   was certainly, I sick
   "Certainly, John was sick"

This is not true when the subject is an enclitic pronoun (Chung and McCloskey 1987: 226-228):

48. * Bhí, cinnte, sé tinn
    Was, certainly, he sick
    "Certainly, he was sick"

*Cinnte* insertion, then is impossible between a clitic and its host. *Cinnte* cannot appear between *is* and the predicate (49)

49. * Is, cinnte, dochtúir é
    cop, certainly, doctor him
    "Certainly, he is a doctor.

This clearly suggests that *is* is a clitic, thus providing support to the hypothesis that *is* is a particle rather than a verb.27

As a final nail in the coffin, there is historical evidence to suggest that *is* is truly a preverbal particle. Ó Sé (1987) notes that in West Kerry Irish, there is a definite trend toward the phonological merger of the preverbal particles and *is*. For example, older generations distinguished the Question form of *is* from the Question particle, by the fact that the particle triggered the Eclipsis mutation on following words (indicated here by a superscript ^N), the copula did not. In the speech of most modern speakers these two have merged and both particle and copula trigger Eclipsis and have an identical phonological shape:

50. \[ \text{an} > \text{an}^N \quad \text{an}^N > \text{an}^N \]
    \[ Q.\text{cop} \quad Q.\text{part} \]

---

26 This, obviously, is an exception to the strict VSO order of Irish discussed above in section 1. *Cinnte* is one of only a few adverbs that can be found non-initially.

27 This is of course assuming the generalization that functional elements show up as particles which often take the form of morphophonological clitics, whereas lexical items (pronouns excluded) rarely show up as morphophonological clitics.
From the morphological, syntactic and phonological evidence, then we can conclude that *Is* is really a pre-predicate particle rather than a verb\(^\text{28}\). This combined with the evidence from the usage of *Is* and *Te* from section 2.1 will provide us with a strong argument for analysis to be proposed below.

2.3 **An Analysis of Nominal Predicates with Is**

Let us now consider the basic structure of a sentence with a nominal predicate (marked with *Is*) in Irish. The word order is as follows:

51. *Is* + Predicate Nominal + subject

As mentioned above, this word order is reminiscent of the word order of simple tensed clauses:

52. Particle + Verbal Predicate + subject (+object)

Given that the word order in (52) is derived by head movement of the predicate to an *Agr* position, let us assume that the word order in (51) is similarly derived\(^\text{29}\). A predicate raises to a functional category to check its features before Spell Out. This is consistent with the evidence that suggests *Is* is a tense particle. This type of derivation is sketched in (53)

53.

![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

We must now ask ourselves why nominal predicates would be allowed to head move in Irish, but not in English. The crucial difference between English and Irish, I claim, is that in Irish nominal predicates with a stage level reading are allowed to bear tense features. This constrasts with all English nominal

\(^{28}\) Historically, however, it was without a doubt a verb. It was fully inflected and is cognate with Lat *essere* (Ó Máille 1912). It seems, however, to have lost its verbal status in the modern language.

\(^{29}\) For the moment I will ignore the issue of Nominal Predicates that are phrasal or otherwise complex. I will return to these in section 4.
predicates (and Irish stage level predicates) which require the support of some semantically null verb to bear the tense features. In Irish these tense features are realized on the proclitic *is*. We can thus posit a parameter concerning the obligatoriness of auxiliary verbs with nominal predicates. English is a language which always requires verbal support, Irish requires verbal support only for stage level predicates, French headlines require verbal support for individual level predicates (Vinet 1993) and Hebrew never requires a verb:

54. **Tense Bearing Unit Parameter (TBU)**-- Nouns can bear tense:
   - English, French: Off
   - Irish: Individual Level only
   - French Headlines: Stage Level only
   - Hebrew: On

With such a parameter, there are expected to be lexically-marked exceptions, this is the case in Irish. The exceptional adjectives and PPs discussed above are examples of predicates that are lexically marked as allowing a tense feature.

We can ask ourselves if there is any evidence for the assertion that nominal predicates in Irish project TPs. Such evidence comes from small clauses. Under the assumption that small clauses do not have a tense projection, nominal predicates should not be allowed with them. In Irish the complementizer *Agus* ‘while/since/and’ introduces small clauses.

55. Agus [é i gCalafóirnia]...
   * And him in California
   “And he is/was in California”

In keeping with the above prediction, nominal predicates are not allowed with *Agus*.

56. * agus [é dhlíodóir]
   * and him lawyer
   “and he is/was a lawyer”

---

30 This may correspond, in some way beyond the scope of this paper, to a version of UG where the TBUP only make reference to certain tense features. As noted in Ó Sé (1983) Irish nominal predicates only seem to show a Past/non-past (or Irrealis/Realis) distinction. Thus perhaps the TBUP only refers to the ability of nominal predicates to bear this one specific feature.

31 Again, I will deal with the head movement of phrasal categories below in section 4.

32 Of course, the stage level equivalent of this:

* agus é ina dhlíodóir
  * Since him in-his doctor
  “Since he is/was a doctor”
This is consistent then with the notion that nominal predicates in Irish bear tense. Since they bear tense they cannot appear in conjunction with the tenseless complimentizer Agus.

Let us now consider the status of arguments in Nominal clauses. In Irish, the subjects of nominal clauses show up, surprisingly, with accusative case:

57. Is dochtaír é
Cop doctor him.acc
He is a doctor.

This is a very puzzling feature of Irish nominal clauses. Why should the subject show up with accusative case? Given that for verbal predicates Irish is a nominative/accusative language, it would be natural to set our Obligatory Case Parameter (Bobaljik 1993) to an active AgrS. This, however, fails to account for the case marking in (57). The sentence in (57) is would be accounted for if the parameter were set with an active AgrO (absolutive case marking). We cannot have both settings in a single language. It thus follows that the OCP is too narrow a conception of case facts. I propose that the correct Parameter makes direct reference to specific Tense and Aspect features. Certain Inflectional complexes will only be projected with certain tenses or aspects. The reader will recall that Ó Sé (1990) claims that the tense distinction shown on Irish nominal predicates seems to be Realis/irrealis. This distinction does not appear to occur on other predicates in the language. We can thus correlate the presence of this feature to the odd case marking facts. For Irish, a predicate

is perfectly grammatical

33 Subjects of *Is* in Old Irish were marked by the preposition “do” not the accusative case (Thurneysen 1980: 493): *(Is) di Iudéib doib* (Old Irish)

cop of Jews to-them
“They are of the Jews”

34 Or perhaps more accurately an active T

35 I am using the term “absolutive case marking” in the strict sense of Bobaljik (1993), that is, a case where the subject of an intransitive and the object of a transitive take the same case as opposed to the subject of a transitive. This is seen in the following paradigm, where the subject of the intransitive (i) is identical to the object of the transitive predicate in (ii):

i. Is dochtaír é “he is a doctor”
Cop doctor he.acc

ii. Is maith liom é “I like it”
Cop good with.me he.acc

The subject of (i) and the object of (ii) both take accusative case, thus are “absolutive” in this sense, compared to the dative “ergative” subject of (ii).
bearing an irrealis/realis feature will project an inflectional complex with an 
active AgrO36, whereas all other features will project an active AgrS. A similar 
case can be made for the mixed ergative system of Hindi, where 
ergative/absolutive case marking only shows up in the perfective tenses 
(Mahajan 1990). The presence of a perfective feature will force an active AgrO, 
imperfectives will have AgrS. We can thus revise the Obligatory Case 
Parameter to read something like the following:

58. Obligatory Case Parameter
   i. The active Agr Node is S/O
   ii. Given an Aspect or Tense node    a. [y],
      b. the active node is S/O

Presumably, the second of these conditions can be learned only through direct 
positive evidence. The settings for some sample languages thus are as follows:

59.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
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<th>Irish</th>
<th>Hindi</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i)</td>
<td>AgrS</td>
<td>Agro</td>
<td>AgrS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii a)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>[irrealis]</td>
<td>[Perfective]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii b)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>AgrO</td>
<td>AgrO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why there the correlation that holds in (58ii) exists seems to be a mystery and 
we can only speculate on why such a condition might exist37.

36 The question which naturally arises at this point is whether, apart from 
the case facts, there is any evidence to suggest that the subject of a nominal 
predicate is in fact lower than the subject of an intransitive verbal predicate. 
Unfortunately, the data on this point is annoyingly recalcitrant. Whereas most 
Ergative/Absolutive language allow absolutive (Accusative) subjects of 
infinitives, but disallow Ergative (Nominative) ones (see Bobaljik 1993 for a 
discussion of these facts), Irish does not allow any infinitive nominal predicates. 
(This presumably has to do with the requirement that nominal individual level 
predicates bear tense in Irish) So the appropriate predications is not testable. The 
only available source of evidence for this is the case marking itself.

37 An alternative solution to the absolutive one presented here was 
suggested to me by Ken Hale (p.c.) he suggests that the “nominative” forms of 
the pronouns (those beginning with /j/; sé, sí, and síd) and the accusative forms 
(those with out /j/: é, í, íad) are not necessarily showing Case, but are merely 
allomorphologic reflexes of the same morpheme, where the “s” forms are found 
directly after a tensed verb and the “s-less” forms are found elsewhere. This 
account is certainly consistent with all the facts of Irish pronouns, and its 
adoption would not harm the rest of the raising story presented elsewhere in this 
paper. It does, however, fail in the sense that it is not the strong assumption 
about the nature of the relationship between morphological case and syntactic 
base. That assumption being that there is a direct correspondence between the 
structural position of an element and its morphological case. I will assume this
We can now see how this system works. I will show how my system correctly predicts the case assignment found in sentences like (57). Since this predicate bears a tense feature (as is shown by the proclitic *Is*), it projects a TP. Since this is a nominal predicate, the active element is the TP internal Agr. The initial projection of such a sentence thus looks like (60):

60.

```
TP
  T'
  T
  AgrOP
     AgrO'
     AgrO
     NP
       subj
       N
       N
       [α,ν]
```

The Nominal predicate raises through AgrN checking its agreement features and then raises to the spec of TP to check its tense ([η]) features. By raising through AgrN, the predicate has formed the complex head [N + AgrN], this is the [Pred + Agr] accusative case assigner. The subject raises to the specifier of AgrNP, where it will receive accusative case marking.

---

Strong version, where Irish, like English, is showing a real syntactic case distinction in its pronouns.
AgrS is not Active in the representation, so no Nominative case is assigned and the subject does not raise to the specifier of TP. This derives the correct case marking and word order effects of Irish nominal clause predicates and thus serves as evidence in favour of the proposal posited above.

3. Problem Cases and Extensions

In this section, I will consider some problems and extensions of the system discussed above. In section 3.1, I will explore cases where a phrasal category seems to be undergoing head movement. In section 3.2, I will look at the special cases of definite predication. In section 3.3, I will examine the problematic case of reciprocal binding in nominal predicates. Finally, in section 3.4 I will show how the system can be extended to account for focus constructions in Irish.

3.1 Complex predicates

Thus far in this paper I have only considered sentences like (72) below, where there is a bare, indefinite noun functioning as a predicate.

62. Is dochtúir é
cop doctor him
“he is a doctor”

The obvious question arises, however, as to what happens in copula sentences where the predicate is complex in some way. Take for example the following sentences of English:
63. a. John is a doctor of animals
   b. Kathleen is the woman of ill-repute
   c. Slavko is a man who likes his coffee black
   d. Slobodan is the fat Bulgarian

In the analysis given above the nominal predicate head undergoes head movement raising through each of the functional projections. This should be impossible for phrasal categories like the bolded phrases in (63). Thus we predict that complex predicates in Irish should not appear in initial position. This predication is absolutely incorrect:

64. Is dochtúir ainmhí é
    Cop doctor animals.gen him
    "He is a doctor of animals"

This is problematic for the account given above in section 3. What I have claimed to be head movement is showing up with a phrasal category. This should be impossible. An account, however, can be made of such sentences and there is a small amount of empirical evidence to support such an account.

Let us assume that complex predicates are all headed by a determiner. In order for the determiner to function as a true predicator it must have some lexical content. This requirement on lexical content is satisfied by the fact that its complements incorporate into it. This is consistent with Watanabe’s (1993) claim that all clausal elements incorporate into Comp (or Det) at some level. The complex head under D₀ then behaves like a normal predicate and raises through the functional projections to T₀, and the subject raises to the specifier of the AgrP. This derivation is seen in (65)
The evidence to support such an analysis comes from Extraction phenomena. The test is as follows: If predicates have undergone head movement forming complex heads, then the subcomponents should not be allowed to extract via Wh-movement. There is an obvious problem with such a test, in that the extraction of subconstituents is usually ruled out by some other constraints such as Subjacency, the ECP, or other Island conditions. In English, the extraction of subconstituents is ruled out by exactly these types of constraints. This is seen in the following examples:

66. a. John is the doctor (assume DP)
   b. * What_j is John the t_i

67. a. It is John's book
   b. Who(se)_i is it t_i book

68. a. John is the man who left his book on the table
   b. * What is John the man who left his book on t_i

69. a. Mairi's wedding is the song that/which the piper is going to play
   b. * Which Piper is Mairi's Wedding the song which he/t_i is going to play

One would think that because such sentences are ruled out by other constraints we would not be able to test for incorporation using them. However, Irish does consistently allow subjacency/ECP type violations (McCloskey 1979). If the speaker leaves a resumptive pronoun at the extraction site and changes the highest complementizer from $\lambda^V$ to $\lambda^N$, then a sentence with such a violation is rendered grammatical (see McCloskey 1979 for more details). This is seen in the
following examples. In (70), we have an example of a sentence with a wh-island. Both relative clause formation (70b) and wh-movement of the subject of the embedded clause (70c) are licit, as long as the highest complementizer is \( \alpha^N \), and the resumptive pronoun sé ‘him’ is found at the extraction site. The ECP and subjacency are allowed to be violated under such conditions.

70. a. Biónn fios agat i gconeá \( \text{[cp caidéi aL bhualfídh an piobaire ti]} \)
   \( \text{be.hab know at.2.s always whati COMP play.fut. the piper ti} \)
   “You always know what the piper will play”

b. An Piobaire \( \text{[cp aN mbíonn fios agat i gconeá [cp caidéi aL bhualfídh sé j ti]} \]
   COMP be.hab know at.2.s always whati COMP play.fut. him
   “The piper who you always know what he will play”

c. Cén Piobaire \( \text{[cp aN mbíonn fios agat i gconeá [cp caidéi aL bhualfídh sé j ti]} \]
   COMP be.hab know at.2.s always whati COMP play.fut. him
   “Which piper do you always know what he will play”

Sentence (71) shows a similar example with a noun with a genitive complement. (71b) shows that relative clause formation is licit, as is wh-movement (71c)

71. a. Tá máthair an fhír san otharlann
   \( \text{Be.pres mother the man.gen in.the hospital} \)
   “The man’s mother is in the hospital”

b. An fear \( \text{[cp aN bhfuil a1 mháthair san otharlann} \)
   COMP be.pres his mother \( \text{in.the hospital} \)
   “The man who (his) mother is in the hospital

c. Cé \( \text{[cp aN bhfuil a1 mháthair san otharlann} \)
   COMP be.pres his mother \( \text{in.the hospital} \)
   “Who is (his) mother in the hospital

Given this, then, we can use wh-extraction as a test to see if subcomponents of the predicate are part of a complex head or not (i.e. have incorporated or not).

The results of such a test are surprising. Unlike normal wh- and nominal islands, complex predicates do not allow wh-extraction of subcomponents. This is seen in (72) and (73)\(^{39}\). The (a) sentences are the basic copular clauses, the (b) sentences show the ungrammatical result of extraction.

72. a. Is fí máthair an fhír í
   \( \text{cop her mother the man.gen her} \)
   “She is the man’s mother”

\(^{39}\) The status of the pronouns í and é found after the Is morpheme in these sentences will be discussed in section 3.2

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The failure of extraction out of these NPs, seems to indicate that some constraint (other than the ECP or Subjacency) is holding here. I propose this has to do with the fact that these are complex heads at Spellout. Once these elements have incorporated into a complex head they are no longer available for phrasal extraction, like that found in (70) and (71). We, therefore, have some empirical support for the notion that complex NPs incorporate into Det before undergoing head movement through the inflectional complex.

3.2 Definite NPs

In this section, I would like to turn to the issue of how definite NPs might function as predicates. By definition, a definite NP is a referring expression, it cannot act as a predicate on some other element. Its semantic content is complete; it does not have any argument positions to be filled. It refers to some object in the real world. It is thus a puzzling fact that definite NPs can function as predicates in copular sentences at all. This puzzle appears to correlate with some strange syntactic features in Irish “equative” copular clauses. In clauses with a definite predicate, a slightly different structure is found (74); an extra pronoun is found between the Is proclitic and the subject NP (75):

---

40 Contra many others (Rapoport 1987, and other citations here), I will assume that these sentences are not cases of an abstract two place predicate, =, meaning “equals”, where both the NPs are arguments (i.e. where the logical form of a sentence like John is the doctor would be something like [(= (john, the doctor)]). My reason for doing so twofold. Firstly, and most importantly, it allows us to maintain the appropriate generalization about the case assignment in copular clauses, and accounts for the presence of the proclitic Is. Secondly, there are some strong pragmatic arguments, that the supposedly equivalent sentences i) “The library is the white house”, and ii) “the whitehouse is the library” do not have identical logical forms. In response to the question “Which building is the library?”; sentence (ii) is a more salient response than sentence (i). This suggests that one of the two NPs is, in fact, functioning predicatively.

41 This pronoun is not found in the Gaith Dobhair dialect (Ó Siadhail 1983)
Andrew Carnie

74. Is + pronoun; + predicate; + subject

75. Is é an dochtúir é
    cop him the doctor him
    “He is the doctor”

This pronoun agrees in number and gender with the predicate NP. This is seen in (76) below, where the pronoun agrees in grammatical gender with the predicate NP., not with the subject.

76. a. Is í an leabharlann an teach bán
    cop agr.fem the library.fem the house.masc white
    The white house is the library

b. Is é an teach bán an leabharlann
    cop agr.masc the house.masc white the library.fem
    “The library is the white house”  (Data from Christian Bros (1960))

In (76a) the pronoun agrees in gender with the feminine word for “library”; in (76b) it agrees with the masculine word for “white house”. The presence of this pronoun and its agreement properties are extremely puzzling. Interestingly, such constructions show up in other languages that don’t use a verbal copula. For example, in Hebrew an agreeing pronoun is required in equative sentences (Rapoport 1987:65):

77. Ha-melex hu david
    the-king 3.sing.masc David
    “David is the King/The king is David” Hebrew

Similar forms are found in Russian as well.

My explanation for why this pronoun appears is to correlate it with the semantic properties of definites. When an NP is definite its argument structure is saturated; it refers\(^{42}\). For such an NP to function predicationally then it must have its argument structure “unsaturated” (in the sense of Higginbotham (1987)). In more practical terms, a definite NP cannot function predicationally unless it is given an extra argument slot to predicate to. Under a minimalist approach, an addition or subtraction of a syntactic feature usually correlates with a morphological distinction. It is my claim then, that the extra pronoun found in Irish (and Hebrew) equative sentences, functions to mark the definite NP as having predicational properties. I will call this pronoun the “unsaturator morpheme”. The question now arises to its exact categorial status. Rapoport (1987) has suggested that such unsaturators behaves in many ways like an agreement morphemes. I will follow this approach, and assume that the

\(^{42}\) i.e. in somewhat simplistic terms, a definite NP is of type \(<e>\), rather than of type \(<e,t>\), thus it cannot function predicationally.\.
unsaturator is simply an overt agreement morpheme showing up on the complex predicational head:

\[
\ldots [\text{TP} [\text{T}+ \text{PRED} + \text{AGR}] [\text{AGR}_\text{P} \text{Subj} [\ldots]]]
\]

pronoun

One further issue remains to be resolved with respect to definite NPs, that is why English definite NPs require verbal support. The obvious answer stems from the other difference between English and Irish. English nouns can’t bear tense, therefore they require verbal support, this same verbal support shows the agreement morphology that unsaturates the argument structure of the definite NP.

### 3.3 Reciprocal Binding

Doherty (1990) presents some evidence that at first glance seems problematic for the approach outlined here. In Irish, like English, the subject of nominal predicate can bind a reciprocal within that predicate:

79. a. [John and Mary], are each other’s bosses
   b. Is costúil lena chéile iad
      \textit{cop like with-3-pl-pos each-other them}
      “They are like one another” (From Doherty 1990)

On the bases of this data he argues that the subject of a nominal predicate in Irish must c-command (and thus be higher) than the predicate into which it binds. He proposes the following structure\textsuperscript{43}:

80.

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{IP} \\
\text{I'} \\
\text{I} \\
\text{COP} \\
\end{array}
\]

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{DP} \\
\text{subject} \\
\text{XP} \\
\text{Predicate} \\
\end{array}
\]

\textsuperscript{43} I am not going to argue against such a structure here, as the model which Doherty presents is based upon fundamentally different assumptions about case assignment, functional categories, and head movement than the one here. The system outlined in this paper, however, accounts for all the facts found in Doherty’s work, and further can be extended to the focus construction (see section 3.4 below) -- an extension which does not lend itself easily to Doherty’s approach.
These facts appear problematic for the approach outlined in this paper, since the subject NP is c-commanded by the complex predicate head. The exact reverse of what the data predicts.

81.

The situation is not as dire as it first appears, however, considering recent advances in the theories of movement and reconstruction. Huang (1993) claims that, for wh-moved constituents at least, VPs (and by extension all predicate phrases) are subject to reconstruction. I propose that we extend this notion to complex predicates which have undergone head movement. This extension follows naturally from the copy theory of movement found in Chomsky (1992). Under the copy theory, elements are not "moved" per se. Rather a copy of the constituent is adjoined at the "moved to" position. Traces under this theory are not just placemakers, but are structurally complete -- but phonologically null -- copies of the moved element. Under this conception of movement the usual c-command requirement on reciprocal binding is met even when a predicate has undergone head movement.\(^{44}\) Consider the following abstract tree. The phonologically null elements ("traces") are represented as boxed in and shaded:

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In this configuration, the head A c-commands one part of the chain of Zs. Let us assume that for the theory of binding of reciprocals the following condition must be met.

\(^{44}\) The obvious question of why Head moved NPs and Wh-moved elements reconstruct, but NP-moved elements don't lies beyond the scope of a short paper like this.
Reciprocal Binding Condition:
The antecedent of reciprocal ρ must c-command some segment of
the chain containing ρ at LF.

This simple condition nicely accounts for the facts in given in (79). The
complex head containing the reciprocal has a phonologically null, but
structurally complete trace below the surface subject position:

This trace is c-commanded by the antecedent head at LF, thus the condition on
reciprocal binding is met.

3.4 Focus

In this section, I turn to an extension of the copular system of Irish posited here.
Irish has a system of clefts that shows focus. I will start out by delineating the
different types of focus constructions in Irish, then I will show how the system
proposed above can be extended to it.

Irish has three different mechanisms for indicating focus or topic. The first is
equivalent to the English stress system. In Irish, a noun may be focused by
stressing it, or --in the case of pronominals or inflected verbs and prepositions--
by affixing an “emphatic” morpheme (usually */-ða/, */-sa/ or */-sa/). This
mechanism is generally used contrastively instead of informationally. An

45 I use the term “contrastive focus” to refer to focus that is constrasting
against an otherwise pragmatically or linguistically prespecified set of
example of the stress type is seen in (85), and an example using an emphatic morpheme on an inflected verb is seen in (86).

85. Níor bhual mé Síle ach bhual mé SEÁN
    Neg hit.past 1  Sheila but hit 1 John
    “I didn’t hit Sheila, but I hit JOHN”

86. Tá Seán anseo. Níl, Táinse anseo
    Be.pres 1 here.  No, be.pres.1s emph here
    “John is here”. “No. I am here”

This type of focus is not relevant to the discussion here, so I will leave discussion of it to to other sources (such as Tancredi 1992). Similarly, I will not discuss the construction found in (87). In this sentence the fronted element appears before a copula-like morpheme, which in turn is followed by the dummy pronoun ea. The semantics of the sentence in (87) are not well understood. It has been variously claimed to be a topic construction and a focus construction in the descriptive literature. This type of construction seems productive only in the Ulster dialect of Irish. In all other dialects only an adverb may be fronted this way (Ó Siadhail 1983). It seems to correspond most closely with the “abnormal” fronting found in Welsh. I refer the reader to Tallerman (1993) for more discussion of this construction in Welsh.

87. Amárach is ea a thiofcaidh Seán (from Stenson 1974)
    Tomorrow COP dummy when come.fut John
    “Tomorrow, it is then that Shawn will come”

The final type of focus construction in Irish is the so-called “cleft construction”46. This construction is the most interesting to us because of its use of the is morpheme. The structure of this construction is shown in (88).

88. Is + focus + wh-comp + rest of clause

This structure is primarily used for informational focus, but can also be used for contrastive focus. This construction is extremely productive and is found widely in Irish literature and discourse. Example (89) shows an example of a discourse fragment where this construction is felicitous:

89. a. Cé thiofcais isteach? (Who will come in)

alternatives. “Informational” focus, on the other hand refers to a contrast against an unspecified set of all possible alternatives. I use the term “focus” to refer to emphasized new information, and “topic” to refer to emphasized old information.

46 Which is also referred to as the pseudocleft construction and the topicalization construction in the descriptive literature.
Nominal Predicates in Irish

b. Is í Bríð a thiocfas isteach
   COP agr Bríð who come.fut.rel inside
   “It is Bríð who will come in”

Clefts differ from other sentences with the *is* morpheme, in that any phrasal category can appear next to *is*:

90. a. Is fear a tá ansin anois
    COP man wh is there now
    “It is a man who is there” (Indefinite NP)

b. Is é an fear a tá ansin anois
   COP him the man wh is there now
   “It is the man who is there now” (Definite NP)

c. Is ag péinteáil cathaoir a bhí an fear inné
   COP prog paint chair wh was the man yesterday
   “It is painting the chair that the man was doing yesterday” (VP)

d. Is i nDoire a bhí mo mhathair inné
   COP in Derry wh was my mother yesterday
   “It was in Derry that my mother was yesterday” (PP)

e. Is inné a bhí an fear ag rith
   Cop yesterday wh was the man prog run
   “It was yesterday that the man was running.” (AdvP)

f. Is fliuch a bhí an lá
   COP wet wh was the day
   “It was wet that the day was” (AdjP)

We must therefore explain why *is* can appears in this construction.

The standard assumption (eg Heggie (1993)) about the structure of clefts holds that they have the following structure, where the XP to the right of the copula is the subject of a predicate relation (after Williams (1980) and Stowell (1984)) with the CP clause that follows it. This is based upon the assumption that the copula selects a small clause complement.

91. \[ [\text{IP} \text{it} [\text{VP} \text{be} [\text{CP} \text{XP}_i [\text{CP} \text{OP}_i \text{that}_i [\text{IP} \ldots [\text{e}_i \ldots ]]]]]] \]
   (from Heggie 1993)

I claim that this notion is perhaps backwards; that at least syntactically, the XP is functionally the predicate and the CP to its right is the argument. In so doing, I provide a structural analysis of the Irish Focus construction, which has never received (to my knowledge) a description before.
If we compare sentences with nominal predicates to focus sentences we find that there is a striking similarity between the two:

92. i. \( Is + (agr) + \text{Predicate} + \text{subject.acc} \)  
    ii. \( Is + (agr) + \text{Focus} + \text{wh clause} \)

Nominal Predicate  
Focus construction

Most importantly, we notice that the focussed phrase is appearing in initial position marked with the tense and agreement particles. In this sense it is behaving like a predicate. I propose that we simple bite the bullet and claim that Foci are, in fact, predicates. A similar approach is found in Kubo (1992) for Japanese foci.

Let us see how this system works. Firstly, to account for their appearance with \( Is \) we can conclude that in Irish the feature [Focus] brings with it the same tense feature found with nominal predicates to the head, no matter what the lexical category of that head is. Secondly, the traditional underlying structure of a small clause is used, but the predication relation is reversed. The focus serves as the predicate and the CP functions as the “argument”

93. \([_{\text{sc}} \text{XP}_1 \ [_{\text{cp}} \text{Op}_1 \ C_{wh} \ [_{s} \ ... \ t_i \ ... \ ]}\]

Thirdly, The Wh-movement involved is really movement of a coindexed operator. (This is consistent with McCloskey’s (1990) claim that all Wh-movement in Irish is really operator movement.) The relationship between the focussed element (predicate) and the gap in the CP (argument) is mediated by the wh-operator. This mediation is accomplished by a coindexation between the focus and the operator. This structure is seen in (94) (The CP could alternately start in the specifier of XP):
This analysis is quite close to that of McCloskey’s (1990) for relative clauses. This is a desirable result, since there is a strong similarity between relative clauses and the focus construction:

95. a. Is é an fear a tá ansin anois  
   COP him the man wh is there now  
   “It is the man who is there now”

b. .... an fear a tá ansin anois  
   ....the man wh is there now  
   “.... the man who is there now”

Focus sentence  
Relative clause

The notion of the focus serving as a predicate finds some support in English Psuedo-clefts and extraposition structures. There is a parallel between expletive/CP alternations in “extraposition” and with English pseudo clefts. Consider the following paradigm of Extraposition alternations between a CP subject and an expletive subject:

96. a. It seems obvious [that John is a poor linguist]  
   b. [That John is a poor linguist] is obvious

97. a. It is unfortunate [that Susan can’t finish her incompletes]  
   b. [that Susan can’t finish her incompletes] is unfortunate.
These alternations can be compared to clefting constructions of the form in (98) where there is an overt wh operator in the CP\textsuperscript{47} (99)

\begin{align*}
98. & \quad \text{It \ be Focus} \ 	ext{[CP ....]} \\
99. \ a. & \quad \text{It is John [who left the party early]} \\
99. \ b. & \quad [\text{who left the party early}] \text{is John}
\end{align*}

There is an obvious parallel between the sentences in (96) and (97) and the ones in (99). A CP is seen to alternate with an expletive; and a consistent "predicate" (\textit{obvious} in (96), \textit{unfortunate} in (97) and \textit{John} in (99)) is consistently to the right of the copula, just as a normal copular predicate (100):

\begin{align*}
100. & \quad \text{John is big} \\
& \quad \text{Fred}
\end{align*}

This is suggestive that the wh-clause in (99) is not functioning like a predicate to the focussed element, rather that the focus is appearing syntactically in a position associated with predicates. Furthermore, there is a strong resemblance between the pseudoclefts of English and the focus construction of Irish. The foci is in a predicate position (in Irish, it is in initial position, marked by the tense particle \textit{is}; in English, it follows the verb to be) and the subject position is occupied by a wh-clause. This can be seen by comparing (99b) with any of the sentences in (90) above.

4. \textbf{Conclusion}

In this paper, I have attempted to provide an account of some strange case marking and word order facts in Irish: the copular and focus clauses. I have suggested that nominal predicates assign absolutive (Agr0) case to their single arguments based upon an extension of Bobaljiks obligatory Case Parameter. I have shown that the \textit{is} morpheme in Irish is not a verb, but rather a tense particle; and that the \textit{is/Tá} distinction is not one of individual/stage level, but rather one depending upon which lexical categories are allowed to bear tense morphology in a given language.

In order to account for complex phrasal categories appearing in a position that should be reserved exclusively for heads, I have claimed that complex predicates in Irish incorporate prior to head movement. I have presented some evidence from extraction phenomena to suggest that this approach is correct. This in turn leads to an account of how the presence of an argument structure unsaturating agreement morpheme allows for the presence of definite NP predicates. Finally,

\textsuperscript{47} I will not attempt an account of this restriction here, although see Heggie (1993) for some interesting speculations that this is due to theta-selectional properties of the operator.
I have attempted to show how my analysis of *Is clauses can be extended to focus constructions and sentences with reciprocal binding.

Much work remains to be completed on this topic and will be the subject of future research. For example, it remains to be seen why, from a semantic perspective, there is a correlation between the presence of the tense morphology and semantic type. I hope, however, that the work completed here is a first step towards accounting for a set of complicated and intricate data.

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