Mixed categories in Irish

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ABSTRACT

In this short paper, I look at the phenomenon of “mixed category” verbal nouns in Irish. Unlike previous accounts, I claim that nominal characteristics of these categories follow from two sources: In one group of verbal nouns, they exhibit nominal properties because they have nominal functional morphology (following Borsley and Kornfilt, 2000). In the other group, there is no nominal functional structure and the “nominality” of verbal nouns is epiphenomenal. Instead, I claim that the relevant “nominal” properties of this second group are simply the effect of an inherent-case-as-repair strategy used when a structural case position is unavailable due to a variety of causes, including idiosyncratic selectional effects.

1. Introduction

Baker (2003) proposes a set of absolute definitions of lexical categories. He defines verbs as categories that license specifiers without a functional head, nouns as categories with referential indices and adjectives as categories with neither property. Mixed categories, like the Irish verbal noun1 (henceforth VN) example in (1), are a serious challenge to such approaches.

(1) a. Tá Seamus ag seinm an ceoil go deas.
   be.PRES James PROG play.VN the.GEN music.GEN ADV nice
   ‘James is singing the song nicely.’

1 I use the term “verbal noun” here following the tradition in descriptive Irish linguistics. However, given the analysis in this paper, they might be better viewed as “nominal verbs” or “nominalized verbs”.

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2 Glossing conventions and abbreviations used in this paper: 1/2/3 = first/second/third person; ADV = adverbial particle; COP = copula; F = feminine; GEN = genitive; M = masculine; PERF = perfective; POSS = possessive; PL = plural; PRES = present; PROG = progressive; RECPERF = recent perfective; S = singular; STAT = stative aspect; VN = verbal noun.

3 This is a constructed example, checked with my consultant. A naturalistic example with an adverbial:

(i) gan a bheith ag seinm go róthapa go róluaith
   without 3SM be.VN PROG play ADV too.quick ADV too.slow
   ‘without it being played too fast too slow’
   (http://www.beo.ie/index.php/archive_id=1455&page=archive_content)

A naturalistic example with a genitive object:

(ii) ... Tá i bhfad níos mó daoine ag seinm an cheoil thraidisiúnta na laethanta seo.
   be.PRES far COMP more people PROG play.VN the.GEN music.GEN traditional the.PL days here.
   ‘There are far more people playing the traditional music these days.’
   (http://www.foinse.ie/gne-ailt_det.php?nid=49)
b. Chuala mé seinm dheas ceoil.  
Heard I  play.vn nice  music GEN  
'I heard nice playing music.'

c. Ni mór don iarrthóir a luas ceoil a shocrú  
NEG big of.the competitors their  speed music GEN 3SM settle  
le linn na seinne sin.  
with duration the GEN  play.vn GEN there.  
'The competitors must set their speed during that playing.'

We find that the VN seinm in (1a) has properties of both verbs and nouns: It takes arguments like a tensed verb (the arguments are unambiguous and obligatory); it can take adverbial modification, and it can assign structural cases (the latter point is not seen in 1, but is a matter of register variation discussed at length in section 3). On the other hand, it has number of properties that make it look more like a noun: in both (1a) and (1b) we see that its complement takes genitive case and in (1c) the VN itself bears genitive case-marking – a hallmark of nominals. There is clearly more going on with these VN categories than is predicted by Baker’s account.

Verbal nouns are the primary form of nominalized verb in the language. Much of the early literature on VN categories attempts to find a single category for the forms (see for example, Willis, 1988, Borsley, 1993, 1997, and Guilfoyle, 1997). Building upon work by Rouveret (1994) and Zaring and Hirschbuhler (1997), Borsley and Kornfilt (2000)5 (henceforth B&K) offer an interesting account of mixed categories in Turkish. They suggest that such categories are underlyingly verbal, but have a nominal functional category, such as a determiner or other nominal functional structure, dominating the VP.

(2)

A variant on this approach can be found in the literature from Distributed Morphology (see for example, Fu et al., 2001; Alexiadou, 2001), where an acategorial root is dominated by both a verbalizing v category and a nominalizing n category:

(3)

4 This is a constructed example. A naturalistic example in an argument position:

(i) 'Tá úire agus beocht ag gabháil leis an tseinm ar an albam seo.'  
Be.PRES fresh and alive PROG take with the play.vn on the album here  
'The playing on this album is fresh and lively.'

(http://www.intercelt.ie/downloads/081209g.txt)

A naturalistic example with a genitive object is taken from Ó Dónaill's Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla (1992: An Gúm, p. 1085):

(ii) seinn ceoil  
play.vn music GEN  
'playing of music'

An example with adjectival modification: (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKzpiwlYP2E)

(iii) seinn álainn uait anseo.  
Playing beautiful from.2s here  
'Beautiful playing from you here'

5 But cf. Borsley (1997) who argues against such an approach.
As B&K themselves note and defend, this kind of analysis predicts that VNs should not exhibit any of the internal properties of N heads – only the properties associated with the nominal functional category. For example, VNs should not assign genitive case if they also take adverbs: as the inside of these structures is verbal. Similarly, VNs should not exhibit any outwards verbal properties as viewed from the outside these are Ns. Adopting a distinction proposed by Borsley (1993) distinguishing between argument (AVN) and predicative (PVN) uses of VNs (4), I claim that both of these predictions are at least partly false.

(4)  

**Argument VNs (AVN)**  
\[ \begin{array}{l}
\text{a. Chuala} \ \text{m} \ \text{an} \ \text{tseinm}.
\end{array} \]

\['I heard the playing.'\]

**Predicative VNs (PVN)**  
\[ \begin{array}{l}
\text{b. T} \ \text{Seamus} \ \text{ag} \ \text{seinn} \ \text{ceoil}.
\end{array} \]

\['James is playing music.'\]

Predicative verbal nouns (PVNs) show no external nominal properties, and behave like true verbs outwardly, with the exception that they are untensed. I claim that these forms lack a nominal functional structure, and have fully verbal functional categories dominating them; they are simply defective in tense morphology and fail to undergo an agree relation with T. I also claim that both kinds of VN appear to show both internal verbal and internal nominal properties, such as genitive case marking on objects. In (5), I present a summary of the way the categorial behavior of the two kinds of verbal nouns is realized.

(5)  

\[ \begin{array}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
& \text{AVN} & \text{PVN} \\
\hline
\text{Outwardly Nominal} & \text{a)} \text{Yes} & \text{b)} \text{No} \\
\hline
\text{Outwardly Verbal} & \text{c)} \text{Yes} & \text{d)} \text{No} \\
\hline
\text{Inwardly Nominal} & \text{e)} \text{Yes} & \text{f)} \text{Yes} \\
\hline
\end{array} \]

Since both AVNs and PVNs are assumed to contain some internal verbal structure, the fact that both are inwardly verbal is trivial and is omitted from this chart and the next. B&K's analysis accounts for (5a, b) but fails to capture (5c, d, e, and f). The structure of this paper parallels the structure of my analysis. We will briefly investigate “outwardly” nominal behaviors of VNs. In section 2, I show that B&K are correct about AVNs (5a) and (5b). They do indeed clearly show the behavior of a structure with nominal functional categories. In section 3, I show that PVNs have all the properties we might expect of real verbs, except that they are untensed (5d and e). Finally, we will investigate the “inward” properties of VNs. In sections 4 and 5, I show that the apparently inward nominal properties of both types of VN (5c) and (5f), actually fall out from the fact that in these cases, the argument cannot move to a structural case position via object shift, and a last resort inherent case strategy is used to save the derivation. A summary of the types of explanation is shown in (6):

(6)  

\[ \begin{array}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
& \text{AVN} & \text{PVN} \\
\hline
\text{N-out} & \text{F}_N & \text{Lack of } \text{F}_N \\
\hline
\text{V-out} & \text{F}_N & \text{Lack of } \text{F}_N \\
\hline
\text{N-in} & \text{Lack of Structural Case Assignment} & \text{F}_N \\
\hline
\end{array} \]

2. AVNs Nominal Out (Yes), Verbal Out (No)

I start with a brief summary of the properties of VNs appearing in argument positions, and provide some brief comments on why these properties are expected to fall out from B&K’s analysis. These are all properties of having a nominal functional category. Since I am largely assuming that B&K are correct about the analysis here, I cover this material primarily for completeness.

2.1. Argument positions and functional categories

The first relevant property is definitional, possibly circular, but argument verbal nouns serve as arguments. In this regard, AVNs behave like DPs. They are saturated and referring. Similarly predicted by B&K’s analysis is the fact that AVNs appear with determiners (such as an/na in Irish):

(7)  

\[ \begin{array}{l}
\text{Chuala} \ \text{m} \ \text{an} \ \text{tseinm}.
\end{array} \]

\['I heard the playing.'\]

\[ \begin{array}{l}
\text{Heard} \ \text{I} \ \text{the} \ \text{play}.\text{VN}
\end{array} \]

AVN and PVN are my coinages, but the distinction is discussed at length in Borsley (1993).

The s–ts alternation seen in this form is one of the many consonant mutations in the language.
2.2. Adverbial modification

AVNs also appear with adjectival rather than adverbial modification. In Irish, the difference between an adjective and an adverb is expressed using a pre-modifier particle (*go). These modifiers are disallowed in AVNs (however, see section 3.4 below where these particles are seen to be obligatory in PVNs).

(8) Chuala m̄́e seinm (*go) deas.
    Heard I playVN ADV nice
    'I heard nice playing.'

Following Cinque's (1999) analysis of adverbial modification based in functional categories, let us make the not unreasonable auxiliary assumption that the functional categories licensing modifiers in DPs are distinct from those in the verbal domain, and disallow adverbial modification. The functional structure then would limit the modification to adjectives and exclude adverbs.

2.3. Case

In Irish, AVNs can bear genitive case (Guilfoyle, 1997) when they are a complement to another noun. We expect this if they are outwardly nominal.

(9) a. fonn troda
    desire fight.VN.Gen
    'the desire to fight' (Guilfoyle, 1997:197)

b. ĺ̮a breithe
    day birth.VN.Gen
    'birthday8' (Guilfoyle, 1997:197)

As is well known from languages like German, case is often realized on determiners, as seen in the masculine forms in (10)

(10) der 'the.nominative', den 'the accusative', dem 'the dative', des 'the genitive'

The same is true in Irish:

(11) Masculine:  
    Singular         | Plural       
    Common an\textsuperscript{T} | na\textsuperscript{H} 
    Genitive an\textsuperscript{L,2} | na\textsuperscript{E,1} 
    Vocative a\textsuperscript{L,1} | a\textsuperscript{L,1} 
    Prepositional an\textsuperscript{E,2} | na\textsuperscript{H} 

    Feminine:  
    Singular         | Plural       
    Common an\textsuperscript{L,2} | na\textsuperscript{H} 
    Genitive na\textsuperscript{H} | na\textsuperscript{E,1} 
    Vocative a\textsuperscript{L,1} | a\textsuperscript{L,1} 
    Prepositional an\textsuperscript{E,3} | na\textsuperscript{H} 

The ability to bear case may well be a diagnostic then for nominal functional structure, such as determiners.

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8 This is likely not a compound; it does not have the lenition morphology typically associated with compounding in Irish. If it were a compound it would be written *ĺ̮á*bhreithe, with the initial consonant of the second word marked as having undergone lenition by orthographically inserting the letter <h> after the <b>.

9 The superscripts here reference the initial consonant mutations triggered by each of these forms, the orthographic alternations are:

- \textsuperscript{L,1}: p → ph, b → bh, m → mb, f → fh, t → th, d → dh, s → sh, c → ch, g → gh.
- \textsuperscript{L,2}: same as \textsuperscript{L,1} except with s → ts, and no t or d alternations.
- \textsuperscript{E,1}: p → bh, b → mb, f → hfh, t → dt, d → nd, c → gc, g → ng, vowel → n-vowel.
- \textsuperscript{E,2}: same as \textsuperscript{E,1}, but without a t or d alternation.
- \textsuperscript{E,3}: same as \textsuperscript{E,2}, but with the addition of: s → ts.
- \textsuperscript{T}: vowel → r-vowel.
- \textsuperscript{H}: vowel → h-vowel.
2.4. Argument licensing and realization

The realization of arguments, would at first blush, appear to be an “inward” property since argument structure is typically seen as a lexical property of predicates. Nevertheless, there is a good argument to be made that the realization or licensing of arguments is best construed as an outward property. For example, it typically assumed that even in control constructions, transitive and unergative predicates have external arguments but the non-finite T in control constructions does not license the realization of this argument. This has to do with the relevant functional categories/extended projections rather than with the inherent properties of the predicate. The arguments of nominalizations in English show an optional pattern of argument realization. Arguments are optional (12a) and (12b), and when realized can be ambiguous in their interpretation as agents or themes (12c):

(12) a. the singing
b. John's singing
c. His beating was horrible (ambiguous)

The same facts hold true of Irish AVNs. Arguments are optional and ambiguous (Guilfoyle, 1997).

(13) a. Tá an seinm go deas. (Irish AVN)
    be.PRES the playing ADV nice
    'the playing is nice'
b. Is maith liom seinm (Seáin). (Irish AVN)
    COP good with.1S playing (John.GEN)
    'I like (John's) playing.'
c. Bhí a bhualadh go h-uafásach. (Irish AVN)
    be.PAST his beating ADV horrible
    'His beating was horrible.'
    (reading 1: his = theme, reading 2: his = agent)

VNs have inwardly verbal properties (they introduce arguments) that are dominated by an outward-looking nominal functional category, which limit the outward realization of these arguments.

The data presented throughout this section offer confirming evidence for B&K's analysis, at least as it applies to AVNs. This is seen in the argument structure and overt determiners of AVNs, in the fact that they bear case take adjectives instead of adverbs and realize their arguments in a pattern consistent with nominal functional structure.

3. PVNs: Nominal Out (No), Verbal Out (Yes)

In this section we consider PVNs, which behave not as if they have nominal functional structure, but instead verbal functional structure (except tense). These properties should fall out from either not having a nominal functional category dominating it or having a verbal functional structure instead.

3.1. Positional properties and co-occurrence with functional categories

By definition, and again perhaps circularly, PVNs can be predicates, but they cannot be arguments. In Welsh for example, PVNs cannot be the subject of a passive, or any other argument position that is limited to DPs and excludes VPs.10

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10 The editors of this volume have suggested to me (p.c.) that this might be due to other factors than category of the phrase. For example, it might be due to the fact that there is an uncontrolled PRO. In the case of Irish, at least, this explanation would not work; PRO in the language can freely alternate with overt uncontrolled subjects (Guilfoyle, 1990; Carnie and Harley, 1997), and so we would expect overt subjects in these positions to make the construction grammatical, which they do not. Example (14d) is not improved with an overt subject, even when shifting to a more typical infinitival structure:

i) Gheall mė é rud a thabhairt dī.
    Pledge.PAST I him thing 3SM give to.3SF
    'I pledged (for) him to give something to her.'

ii) Bhí [é rud a thabhairt dī] dealata agam.
    be.PAST [him thing 3SM give.vn to.3SF] pledge.IA at.1S
    'I have pledged for him to give something to her.' (Lit. him to give to her was pledged by me)
(14) a. Ceisiodd pawb ganu ’r anthem. (Welsh PVN

tried everyone sing the anthem

‘Everyone tried to sing the anthem.’ (p. 56)

b. ’Cafodd canu ’r anthem ei geisio gan bawb.
got sing the anthem SM try everyone

Singing the anthem was tried by everyone (p. 56)

c. Stop mé ag deanamh an rud sin. (Irish PVN)

Stop,PAST I PROG do,VN the thing this

‘I stopped doing this thing.’


be,PAST PROG do the thing this stop,VA at.1S

‘I have stopped doing this thing.’

(lit. Doing this thing was stopped by me)

Borsley (1993) shows that PVNs in Welsh can appear in a variety of positions that other NPs cannot, such as non-finite complements to modals (15a), as the complements to auxiliaries in periphrastic tenses (15b) and as the complements to certain control and raising predicates (15d–e). In Irish (15f–i), a similar distribution is found; PVN constructions follow, among other things, modals (e.g. Is féidir le ’can’, ní mór do ’must’), as complements to auxiliaries (tá ’be’), and in raising and control constructions. A reasonably complete list of such environments can be found in Stenson (2008:161).

(15) a. Dylai Gwyn ddisgrifio ’r llun.

ought Gwen describe the picture

‘Gwyn ought to describe the picture.’ (p. 42)

b. Mae Gwyn yn disgrifio ’r llun.

be,PRES Gwyn PROG describe the picture

‘Gwen is describing the picture.’ (p. 42)

c. Mae Gwyn yn debyg o ddisgrifio ’r llun.

be,PRES Gwyn PRED likely of describe the picture

‘Gwyn is likely to describe the picture.’ (p. 42)

d. Mae Gwyn yn awyddus i ddisgrifio ’r llun.

Is Gwyn PRED eager to describe the book

‘Gwyn is eager to describe the book.’ (p. 43)

e. Disgwyliodd Gwyn i Emrys ddisgrifio o ’r llun.

expected Gwyn to Emrys describe the picture

‘Gwyn expected Emrys to describe the picture.’ (p. 43)

f. Ní mór dom an scéal a scríobh.

NEG big to.1S the story SM write

‘I must write the story.’

g. Tá mé tar-eis an scéal a scríobh.

be,PRES 1S PERF the story SM write

‘I’ve just read the book.’

h. Ba mhaith liom Seán an scéal a scríobh.

cop good with.1S Sean the story SM write

‘I want Sean to write the story.’

i. Tá mé ábalta an scéal a scríobh.

be,PRES 1S able the story SM write

‘I am able to write the story.’

11 All data from Welsh is taken from Borsley (1993), unless otherwise noted.

12 In Irish the passive structure typically takes on a perfective interpretation. Impersonal constructions are used to express true passivity.

13 The morpheme yn has many uses, two of which are relevant here: one as a progressive marker, the other as the marker of a non-verbal predication. As in Borsley (1993), these are given distinct glosses in this paper.
By contrast, PVNs cannot appear with determiners (16), but can appear with aspect morphology (17).

(16) a. *Dylai Gwyn yr ddisgrifio ‘r llun. (Welsh PVN)
   Ought Gwen the describe the picture
   ‘Gwyn ought the describe the picture.’

b. *Dylai Rhiannon y canu (o)’r anthem. (Welsh PVN)
   Ought Rhiannon the sing.VN (of) the anthem
   ‘Rhiannon ought the singing (of) the anthem.’ (p. 45)

c. *Ní mór dom an falbh. (Irish PVN)
   Neg big with.1 s the leave
   ‘I must the leaving.’

(17) a. Tá Seán ina shuí. (Irish PVNs)
   be.PRES Sean STAT.3SM sitting
   ‘Sean is sitting.’

b. Tá Seán ag dúl abhaile.
   be.PRES Sean PROG go.VN home
   ‘Sean is going home.’

c. Bhí Seán tar-eis dúl abhaile.
   be.PAST Sean RECPERF go.VN home
   ‘Sean has just gone home.’

d. Bha Iain air fàlbh\textsuperscript{14} (Scots Gaelic PVN)
   be.PAST Iain PERF leave.VN
   ‘Iain had left.’

Readers familiar with the morphology of Irish might object that this aspect morphology is homographic (and often homophonic) with prepositions in the language (19). Prepositions are presumably nominal rather than verbal functional categories and this would point to an outwardly nominal character for PVNs.

(18) Irish:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Aspectual usage</th>
<th>Prepositional Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ag</td>
<td>Progressive</td>
<td>at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i(n)</td>
<td>Stative</td>
<td>in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tar-eis or i ndiaidh</td>
<td>Recent “after”</td>
<td>after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perfective</td>
<td>on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, there is evidence that this is perhaps a diachronic rather than synchronic parallel. For example, McCloskey (1983) argues that ag progressive is not identical to the preposition ag. The preposition is always pronounced /æg/ (and can be stressed as /æg/). By contrast, the aspect marker is usually pronounced /a/, except before vowels. Also, the preposition ag does not take a special agreeing form when it is attached to a possessive pronoun (19a), but the progressive marker does (19b).

(19) a. ag a ‘at his…’

b. \textsuperscript{11} ‘PROG.3SM.POSS’

Indeed in Scottish Gaelic, these forms are not even homographic (the progressive is either a’ or ag, and the preposition is aig). I assume, following Ramchand (1993), Carnie (1995) and many others, that these particles are in fact Asp heads.

\textsuperscript{14} I use Scots Gaelic here because the Irish perfective is created using a passive structure involving a verbal adjective rather than a verbal noun.
3.2. Adverbial modification

In section 2, I argued that adjectival modification in AVNs is due to a Cinquean functional system that is limited to the nominal system. If PVNs lack nominal functional structure, we expect adverbial rather than adjectival modification. This prediction is borne out: modifiers of PVNs require adverbial particles.

\[(22) \text{Ta} \ 's\text{'e} \text{ ag } \text{canadh } \text{ an amhr\'\'in} \ \text{*{(go) bin.}} \ (\text{Irish PVN)}
\]
\[
\text{be.PRES he PROG sing.VN the song ADV nice}
\]

‘He is singing the song nicely.’ (B&K:121; data modified\(^{15}\))

3.3. Case marking on verbal noun

In section 2, following common assumptions about DPs, I claimed that nominal functional structure, like a determiner was a necessary prerequisite for a nominalization to bear case. Irish PVNs cannot bear genitive case (23) (Guilfoyle, 1997).

\[(23) \begin{align*}
\text{a. Ta} \ 'm\text{e} \text{ ag } \text{iarraidh seasamh/*seasaimh.}} \\
\text{be.PRES I PROG try.VN stand.VN.COM/*VN.GEN}
\end{align*} \ (\text{Irish PVN+PVN)}
\]

‘I’m trying to stand.’

\[(23) \begin{align*}
\text{b. Ta} \ 'm\text{e} \text{ ag } \text{brath dul/*duil abhaile.}} \\
\text{be.PRES I PROG intend.VN go.VN.COM/*go.VN.GEN home}
\end{align*} \ (\text{Irish PVN+PVN)}
\]

‘I am intend to go home.’ (data from Christian Bros, 1980)

Assuming that case marking is reflective of functional structure, this is evidence that PVNs lack a nominalizing functional structure that would license genitive case. PVNs cannot bear case.

3.4. Argument licensing

Finally, we find that the licensing of arguments in PVNs also argues against a nominal functional structure. In section 1, we saw that the arguments of nominalizations were optional, and when present were ambiguous. Neither of these properties holds true of PVNs. All arguments are obligatory, and there is no ambiguity what role these arguments bear relative to the PVN.

\[(24) \begin{align*}
\text{a. Ta} \ '\text{Se\'a}n \text{ ag } \text{p\'ogadh an Garda} \\
\text{be.PRES Sean PROG kiss the policeman}
\end{align*} \ (\text{Colloquial\(^{16}\) Irish PVN)}
\]

‘Sean is kissing the policeman.’

\[(24) \begin{align*}
\text{b. } \text{Ta} \ ' \text{ag } \text{p\'ogadh an Garda} \\
\text{be.PRES PROG kiss.VN the Police}
\end{align*}
\]

‘Was kissing the police.’

\[(24) \begin{align*}
\text{c. Ph\'og} \text{ Se\'a}n \text{ an Garda} \\
\text{kiss.PAST Sean the policeman}
\end{align*}
\]

‘Sean kissed the policeman.’

\[(24) \begin{align*}
\text{d. Ph\'og} \text{ an Garda} \\
\text{kiss.PAST the police}
\end{align*} \ (\text{Intended meaning ’kissed the police’.})
\]

The editors of this volume (p.c.) have pointed out to me that this is not conclusive evidence against B&K, in that PVNs might have nominal structure at a deeper level, and have additional argument licensing functional structure on top of the nominalizing functional categories (e.g., a vP or TP dominating the nP nominalizer). This is, of course, an absolutely reasonable alternative analysis, and as such this data is not as compelling as that in previous sections. But when taken together with the accumulated evidence in sections 3.1–3.6, an analysis of PVNs lacking a nominal functional structure emerges. What are PVNs then? Simply put, the totality of these data suggest that PVNs in Irish are little more than untensed verbs, which serve the role of participles in the context of tensed auxiliaries and aspect marking and the role of infinitives in the context of non-finite clauses.

\(^{15}\) I have substituted the more common verb canadh ‘sing’ for the form used by B&K (ceol), which is the noun meaning ‘music’.

\(^{16}\) The case marking here is indicative of spoken Irish rather than literary or standard Irish.
4. AVNs and PVNs Nominal In (Yes)

In this section, I turn to the puzzling case of inwardly nominal properties of both AVNs and PVNs. These properties do not fall out from either the presence of a nominal functional category (or the lack thereof.)

4.1. Genitive Case in Irish verbal noun structures

The salient “inward” nominal property of verbal nouns of both types is the fact that genitive case can be assigned to the objects of verbal nouns. The objects of AVNs appear in the genitive case:

(25) tógáil an tì 
build.VN the house.GEN
‘the building of the house’

With PVNs genitive also surfaces in certain situations. In prescriptive written or literary Irish, the objects of progressives are marked with genitive (26).

(26) Tá mé ag ól an leanna. 
be.pres I PROG drink.VN the beer.GEN
‘I am drinking the beer.’

And in Munster Irish, non-finite embedded clauses with an overt subject obligatorily take a genitive object.

(27) Ba mhaith liom Sea ´ n a tho ´ ga´ il an tı´
COP good with.1S Sean 3SM build.VN the house.GEN
‘I want Sean to build the house.’

On the surface, the genitive case in these three cases is surprising from the perspective of B&K. Indeed, as will be discussed below, they attempt to argue that it is not a real genitive case. In effect, I will agree with this conclusion but for completely different reasons.

However, it is important to note that these environments of genitive case are the minority. In most circumstances, the objects of PVNs in Irish appear in the common case (the morphological form used in both nominative and accusative positions – also sometimes called “direct case”). For example, in most circumstances, objects shift around the verbal noun (Bobaljik and Carnie, 1996) and take this common case form. This order and case marking is found in infinitival structures (28a), after certain modals (28b), in most aspects (28c) and in small clauses (Guilfoyle, 1997:189).

(28) a. Ba mhaith liom an bhean a pho ´ gadh.
COP good with.1S the woman.COM 3SM kiss.VN
‘I want to kiss the woman.’

b. Nì mór dom an bhean a pho ´ gadh.
NEG big to.1S the woman.COM 3SM kiss.VN
‘I must kiss the woman.’

c. Tá mé tar-eis an bhean a pho ´ gadh.
be.PRES 1S RECPERF the woman.COM 3SM kiss.VN
‘I have just kissed the woman’

Even with progressives, in the spoken language, the accusative case is common:

(29) Tá mé ag ól an leann. 
be.PRES I PROG drink.VN the beer.COM
‘I am drinking the beer.’

It appears, then, that aside from the examples (25–27), accusative (common) case is the norm with PVNs in the language, thus suggesting in turn that these structures are wholly verbal in nature and are essentially participles or infinitival forms. We still need to account for the genitive in (25–27), however.

17 This is the 3sm possessive pronoun; it is masculine rather than feminine as part of a common pattern of anti-agreement in the language. See section 5 below for more discussion.
To explain genitive case in Irish PVNs, B&K claim that these structures are not true genitives. While I will align myself with their ultimate result – the genitive is not a structural case in Irish – I must argue that the particulars of their alternative are incorrect. B&K suggest that nominal complements do not bear genitive case, even in DP structures like (25) above. Instead, they claim that construct state DPs such as (30) are “passive nominals” similar to the horse’s picture in English, where the possessive nominal is acting as a subject or specifier rather than a governed complement.

(30) pictiúr an chapaill
    picture the GEN horse GEN

‘the picture of the horse’ (B&K:121)

If construct state DPs are passive nominals, then it is predicted that they cannot occur with both an overt subject and object. B&K observe that the only way to create a complex possessive with both a subject and an object is to use a combination of a construct and a free genitive as in (31), which has a prepositionally marked complement.

(31) pictiúr Chathail den chapaill
    picture Cathal GEN of the horse COM

‘Cathal’s picture of the horse’ (B&K:121)

A construct state with both a genitive subject and a genitive object is predicted to be unacceptable, as in (32).

(32) *pictiúr Chathail chapaill
    picture Cathal GEN horse GEN

Example (32) is indeed ungrammatical, but I believe that B&K are misinformed about the reason for this unacceptability; it has nothing to do with the fact that this has both arguments. It’s ungrammatical because both the word order and the case marking are incorrect. To the extent that (32) has any meaning, it would mean “the horse’s picture of Cathal,” not “Cathal’s picture of the horse.” There is, in fact, a grammatical form with both arguments (33). Note the difference in word order with (32).

(32) pictiúr chapall Chathail.
    picture COM horse COM Cathal GEN

‘Cathal’s picture of the horse’ (B&K 121)

B&K are partly right, in that in constructions like (35), the “object” (horse) is not entirely in the genitive case. This is part of a larger pattern called “Common in form, Genitive in function” (CFGF) which pervades Irish Grammar. CFGF constructions are characterized by two properties. (a) They appear in contexts where genitive would typically be found, and (b) while the root takes the common (accusative/nominative) case, it gets a different consonant mutation than would normally be found in typical common case contexts (Doyle, 2001:64). In (33), we see the morphological form of the common case for teach ‘house’. (34) has the same word in its genitive form: ti (35a) shows a CFGF construction. The word for ‘house’ appears in the common case form (teach), but with the lenition mutation more commonly found in genitive constructions indicated by putting an <h> after the first consonant theach (also seen in Máire becoming Mháire in (33)). A table in (35b) summarizes the forms:

(33) teach Mháire
    house COM Mary GEN

‘Mary’s house’

(34) doras ti
    door COM house GEN

‘a house’s door’

---

18 The formation of the genitive in Irish is incredibly complicated. The morphology is not transparent to the non-Irish speaker but is usually unambiguous. In this example, the genitive case is marked with an <i> before the final <ll>. In the next example, the common case is marked by the absence of this <i>. This is a common inflectional device, but there are many other ways to form the genitive; see Carnie (2008) for a complete discussion of the morphology of case, number and gender inflection in Irish.

19 B&K’s original lacked the required accent mark on the word pictiúr. This correction has also been made for all subsequent variant examples below.
It should be noted that quite apart from these CFGF contexts, the traditional genitive morphology on the root is disappearing from the language generally. The two cases are developing syncretism in terms of ending. However, a distinction between genitive and common form is still present, shifting from the case endings to the initial consonant mutations. This is true in all contexts in the spoken register, where genitive is coming to be primarily marked in consonant mutations (Doyle, 2001) rather than in the traditional common/genitive morphological alternations:

(36) a. teach an ghasúir mhóir (Written Irish)
house the.GEN boy.GEN big.GEN
‘the big boy’s house’ (Data from Doyle, 2001)

b. teach an ghasúr mhór (Spoken Irish)
house the.GEN boy.COM big.COM
“the big boy’s house” (Data from Doyle, 2001).

The form in (32), then, does indeed have a genitive object with a genitive subject; it is just a CFGF construction exhibiting non-standard genitive morphology. This, in turn, means that construct state nominals in Irish cannot be dismissed as “passive” nominals. It is clear that they do allow simultaneous complements and specifiers. Taking this conclusion to the next level, it follows then that genitive case in Irish PVN constructions also cannot be dismissed so easily.

4.2. A distributed morphology account

Assuming then that the marking on the object of a PVN is real genitive case (at least in the form of a CFGF construction), we need an account of this seeming parallel to regular DPs. Genitive case in PVNs cannot be licensed by little n. PVNs do not have the properties of little n – since they have many externally little v-like properties (such as aspect and adverbial modification). Nor can it follow from the presence of a determiner since determiners are not allowed with PVNs. I claim that genitive case in each of the three circumstances in (25–27) falls out simply from the absence of an accusative (common) case assigning head. The reasons for the absence in each situation are different, however.

The analysis of accusative and genitive case that I present is a variant on those proposed by Ramchand (1993) for Scottish Gaelic and Kratzer (2004) for German and Finnish. Let us assume that in the more normal situation (simple tensed clauses and sentences with a shifted object) the accusative version of the common case is uniformly assigned by a category that I will, in anticipation of section 3.4, call Telic. Following Kratzer (2004), let us claim that this head – which distinct from Aspect – bears an interpretable feature of [+telic] and has the function of checking the telicity properties of objects. In Irish, this head either shows up as the particle aL (up until now glossed as 3SM for reasons to be discussed in section 4 below), or is absorbed as the verb head-moves through it on the way to T. The uninterpretable partner of this feature is found on DPs ([uBOUNDED]) and is checked in the specifier of TelicP. The morphological realization of the checked uninterpretable feature in languages like Irish (and Finnish)21 is the form we call “accusative case.”

(37)
Ramchand (1993) showed that in Scottish Gaelic, verbs with shifted accusative objects entail a bounded interpretation of the nominal, and those without them do not:

(38) a. Bha Calum air bainn' a dh'òl. (Scottish Gaelic)
be.PAST Calum PERF milk 3SM drink.VN
'Calum has drunk (some specific quantity of) milk.'

b) Bha Calum ag ól bainne. (Scottish Gaelic)
be.PAST Calum PROG drink.VN milk.
'Calum was drinking milk (no specific quantity).'

We will discuss (38b) below, but what this means is that for sentences like (38a), the structure would be something like (39):

The object shifts to a position before the Telic head a\textsuperscript{1} and the verbal noun. It is assigned accusative case in this position by virtue of a vocabulary insertion rule that targets checked [BOUNDED] features and inserts accusative forms into them. An identical analysis can be given to the Irish forms, which exhibit the same word order effects.

Turning to the genitive case, it is the absence of this TelicP case assigner\textsuperscript{23} (or any other case assigner) that triggers the genitive case repair strategy. Before entering into the details about how this works for each situation, I wish to be explicit about what I mean by repair strategy here. I suggest that when a DP has no case (not even a “null” case like Chomsky, 1996 chapter 1 proposes for PRO), the derivation can be rescued by a late operation of last resort. By this, I am thinking of an operation like the “of-insertion” rule proposed in Chomsky, 1981, whereby “of” was inserted before caseless nominals. Note that this is not the same thing as a default case (in the sense of Legate, 2008). In Irish like many other languages, the default case is the common/accusative form (found for example in the second element in conjunctions, as the subject form in non-finite and small clause structures). Legate claims that “default” cases show up (i.e., the default vocabulary items are inserted) when an underspecified or impoverished case feature structure is present. This is distinct from the Chomsky (1981) style repair strategy case, where an inherent case marking strategy is used to license forms that otherwise lack a case-feature structure. This notion of a repair strategy can be implemented in Distributed Morphology through the use of a dissociated morpheme (Embick, 1997, 1998; Embick and Noyer, 2001):

Dissociation: A morphological signal is dissociated when the morphosyntactic position/features it instantiates are not features figuring in the syntactic computation, but are instead added in the Morphological component under particular conditions (Embick, 1998:2).

As an example, definiteness is not a property of nominals, but of determiners. However, in many languages, definiteness is marked on nominals. Embick and Noyer (2001) cite the case of Swedish, where an unmodified noun is marked with a definite suffix, but a modified\textsuperscript{24} noun has both a definite determiner and a definite ending on the noun:

\textsuperscript{22} It is worth noting that I have been unable to replicate this judgment in my own fieldwork on either Irish or Scottish Gaelic. The reason for this is unclear, but it may be dialectal. In any case, even if the semantic distinction no longer holds in some varieties of the language, it is clear that its effects have been grammaticalized into the functional structure of both languages. Even if the semantic correlation were shown not to hold, then the TelicP analysis could easily be shifted to one using, for example, AgrOP instead (as in Bobaljik and Carnie, 1996 or Harley and Noyer, 1998), with no effect on the general approach pursued here.

\textsuperscript{23} See Harley and Noyer (1998) for an analysis of the failure of particle shift in English mixed nominalizations along these same lines.

\textsuperscript{24} In fact, the situation is considerably more complex than this; adjacency plays a clear role but isn’t relevant here. See also the discussion in Hankamer and Mikkelsen (2005).
The existence of the -en suffix on the noun is motivated by a rule that post-syntactically inserts a copy of the definiteness morpheme onto the noun.

What I propose here is similar, although no copying of features is involved. I suggest that there is a requirement that determiners have morphological case (let us take this to be the DM equivalent of the case filter), and that there is a special rule given in (41) that inserts a morpheme bearing the [GENITIVE] feature next to D, when D immediately follows a lexical root (e.g. N, V) in Irish.

\[
D \rightarrow [D + \text{Case}_{\text{GENITIVE}}] / \sqrt{+ \_}\_
\]

This constraint will not apply when the object has shifted to the specifier of TelicP, or when it is adjacent to a functional item like a preposition.

4.3. Genitive case in DPs

Consider the simplest case: a DP complement to a noun, in a possessive construct state context. In this case, there will be no TelicP, since the Telic head is part of the extended projection of verbal structures. Let us assume that possessive DPs start in the specifier of the NP they possess. Guilfoyle (1990) argued that in Irish construct state nominals, the head noun raises to D in a manner similar to that proposed by Ritter (1988) for Hebrew. This explains why the possessed noun is in complementary distribution with an overt determiner, and why the possessor follows the possessed noun. Adding in the complication of little n, this gives us (42):

\[
(42)
\]

We see here that the possessor DP immediately follows the head N, which contains a root as its rightmost element. The conditioning environment for rule (41) is met, and the determiner on the possessor DP has a genitive morpheme inserted next to it, post-syntactically, as a Last Resort, by virtue of (41). This genitive morpheme can be cashed out two different ways. It can be realized as either as a full out genitive determiner (see 11 above), which in turn triggers the possessor noun to be spelled out in the genitive case, or the [GENITIVE] could surface as the CFGF morpheme which just triggers lenition, and the noun appears in its default common case form. The choice between the two options appears to be largely free in the spoken language.

Consider the real examples in (43):

\[
(43)
\]

25 The exception is a case with multiple possessor nouns like (35a), where only the last DP is spelled out with full genitive case and all intermediate possessors are spelled out via CFGF. The reason(s) for this remains a mystery to me.
The syntactic structure for both of these is identical:

(44)

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{DP} \\
\text{D}_1 + n^+ \sqrt{v} \\
\text{nP} \\
\text{D}_2 \text{Possessor} \\
\text{n'} \sqrt{v}
\end{array}
\]

\(D_1 + n^+ \sqrt{v}\) is spelled out as the construct teach in both forms. Also in both forms the \(D_2\) has the dissociated morpheme [\text{GENITIVE}] attached to it post-syntactically via (41). This [[D][\text{GENITIVE}]] structure is spelled out as \(anl^2\). (43a) has at least two plausible analyses: either a contextually sensitive insertion rule applies to insert the genitive form of the possessor noun (\textit{ghasúir}) or a further fusion process spreads the [\text{GENITIVE}] feature onto the possessor N, which is then realized as the genitive inflected form. Presumably in (43b) an impoverishment rule applies, which allows the default (common case) form of the possessor to be inserted (\textit{gasúr} – lenited to \textit{ghasúir}).

While accusative case seems to be limited to bounded nouns, triggering telic interpretations. It should be noted that there is no such limitation on the possessor (or complement) nouns of construct states. Rule (41) does not distinguish between bounded and unbounded determiners, so both interpretations are possible, if compatible with the internal semantics of the root.

4.4. Genitive case in Munster Irish transitive infinitivals

The second context in which Genitive case is found also involves a situation where an accusative licensing Telic head is not available, so the object DP remains adjacent to the verbal noun head, thus requiring the intervention of (41).

Example (27) is repeated here as (45) as an example of a transitive infinitive with an overt subject in Munster Irish:

(45) \textit{Ba mhaith liom Seán a thógáil an tí} (Munster Irish PVN)

\[\text{COP good with.1S Sean 3SM build.VN the house.GEN}\]

'I want Sean to build the house.'

In Northern varieties of Irish (Ulster and Connemara), infinitival structures such as (45) are realized with SOV order, where both the embedded subject and the embedded object take common case as in (46).

(46) \textit{Ba mhaith liom Séan an teach a thógáil} (Northern Irish PVN)

\[\text{COP good with.1S Sean.COM the house.COM 3SM build.VN}\]

'I want Sean to build the house.'

In all dialects, if there is no subject then the object appears in the common case, pre-verbally:

(47) \textit{Ba mhaith liom an teach a thógáil} (all dialects PVN)

\[\text{COP good with.1S the house.COM 3SM build.VN}\]

'I want to build the house.'

However, in Munster, particularly in literary varieties, as seen above in (45), the object is forced into post verbal position and takes the genitive case if there are both an overt subject and an object. In \textit{Carnie (1995)} and \textit{Bobaljik and Carnie (1996)} (see also \textit{Guilfoyle, 1997} and references cited therein), I argued that the order in (45) is due to a limitation on the number of case positions in Munster Irish. The nature of this limitation is a bit mysterious, but it seems clear that there is a kind of case competition going on here. In Munster Irish, either an object (47) or a subject (45) may appear pre-verbally with the common case, but not both. Note that the telic particle \(d^{l1}\) (glossed as 3Sm in the above examples) is present with the subject DP in (45); this suggests that the specifier of the TelicP is occupied by the subject. How this DP gets into this position, and why this does not happen in all dialects are more than a mystery, but it is one we will leave aside for now. What this means is that for sentences like (45), the specifier of the TelicP is unavailable for the object DP to shift into and check accusative case. Instead, the object must remain to the right of the PVN root. In this position, (41) applies. The relevant syntactic structure for (45) is given in (48) (I leave out v and T so as not to complicate the diagram, and in so doing assume that V is an abbreviation for the root).
The subject DP in (48) checks its case in the specifier of Telic and is spelled out with common (accusative) case. The telic head is spelled out as $a^{11}$, and the untensed verbal root surfaces as the verbal noun. The DP in (48) is caseless, and its D head is adjacent to and follows the root, so the rule in (41) applies inserting a dissociated [genitive] morpheme next to it. All the elements in the object DP are thus subsequently spelled out either in genitive or CFGF forms.

One obvious prediction of this approach is that the boundedness requirement on accusative objects suggested by Ramchand will be absent in these post-verbal genitive objects. Similarly, we predict a boundedness condition on accusative subjects in this dialect, since they appear in the specifier of TelicP. Unfortunately, this is nearly impossible to test. The variety described here is a high-literary register and has a certain archaic quality to it. Native speaker intuitions about boundedness of the genitive object DPs are hard to come by. I have yet to meet a native speaker of this dialect with whom I can test this prediction. A quick web search turns up both mass and count nouns in this position, but more refined judgments cannot be extracted via Google. Thus, verification of this claim, if at all possible, awaits deeper empirical research and the luck of finding the right speaker.

4.5. Genitive case in the progressive aspect

The final situation in which genitive case shows up in Irish is as the object of verbal nouns marking the progressive:

(49) Ta mé ag ól an leanna. (Irish)

be.pres I PROG drink.VN the beer.GEN

'I am drinking the beer.'

As above, I draw on the insights of Ramchand (1993) and Kratzer (2004) to explain this. Ramchand argues that the progressive aspect is semantically incompatible with telic VPs. Progressive aspect requires an unculminated event. Telicity entails a culmination. This corresponds to her observation about Scottish Gaelic (discussed above in section 3.2) that objects of progressives are given unbounded, perhaps conative, interpretations. We can code this incompatibility syntactically by assuming that perfective aspect head selects for the Telic head, but the progressive aspect head does not. With the progressive then, the accusative-checking Telic head is completely absent.

(50)

There is nowhere for the DP to move to check case. This results in a situation where the D is string adjacent to the root V. The repair rule in (41) applies to license the DP by inserting a [GENITIVE] morpheme onto D. This feature is realized as the genitive determiner. The object N is realized with genitive case through a contextually sensitive spell out rule.

4.6. Summary

There are three contexts in Irish where the genitive appears, in apparent contradiction to B&K's analysis. In each of these three cases, the normal accusative licensing head (Telic) is unavailable for feature checking. In DPs, it is simply absent because it is not part of the extended projection of $n$. In Munster transitive non-finite structures, the position is otherwise

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26 My own fieldwork on Scottish Gaelic has shown a slightly different effect. My consultant gives a conative interpretation even to direct objects in the common case.

i) Bhual Pól an fheansa agus mhisig e. (Scottish Gaelic)

Hit.PAST Pol the fence.COM and miss.PAST 3S

'Pol hit (at) the fence and he missed.'

I have yet to determine why there is this conflict between my data and Ramchand's, but it might reduce to dialect variation. In the short term, I will adopt Ramchand's generalization for its convenience to my analysis of Irish, but note that the data aren't as clear-cut as one would want.
occupied by the subject. Finally, in progressives, a telic functional projection is incompatible with the aspectual semantics, so
is not selected for by Asp. One consequence of the absence of this category in each of these circumstances is that some DP
(either the possessor or the object) cannot shift into the accusative position, and is right-adjacent to the root morpheme
(either as a matter of base structure as in progressives and Munster infinitives, or as a consequence of head-movement as in
construct DPs). In these very limited circumstances, the dissociated repair condition in (41) kicks in as a last resort and
inserts a \[GENITIVE\] morpheme, in the spirit of \[“of-insertion”\] in Chomsky (1981). Viewed this way, there is no obstacle to
analyzing PVNs as simple verbal structures without any nominal structure (inwards or outwards).

5. Possessive pronoun objects

One problem with the analysis in section 4 remains, however. In Irish, sentences with verbal nouns invariably realize their
pronominal objects in the form of possessive pronouns. This is true not only in the cases where genitive case is found, but also
in situations where common/accusative case is found with full DPs.

In progressives and in AVN DPs, pronominal objects surface as possessive pronouns:

(51) a. Tá Seán á bhuíladh.
    be.PRES Sean PROC+his
tel.‘Seán is hitting him.’

b. Ní maith liom a bhuíladh
    Neg good with.1s his hit.vn
    ‘I didn’t like his hitting.’

The forms in (51) are not terribly surprising if the underlying object DP is genitive. However, what is more concerning is
the fact that in cases where we’d normally find a shifted accusative object, we can still get the possessive pronoun:

(52) Ba mhaith liom Seán ...
    COP good with.3s John
    … mo phógadh/do phógadh/a phógadh/ar phógadh
    my kiss/your kiss/her kiss/our kiss
    /bhúr phógadh/a phógadh
    /your-pl kiss/their kiss
    ‘I want Sean to kiss me/you/her/our/you-pl/them.’

In Irish (but not Scottish Gaelic: Ramchand, 1993, where forms cognate to (52) are required), we also have the option of
using a shifted object pronoun, with a default 3Sm particle:

(53) Ba mhaith liom Seán tusa a phógadh.
    COP good with.1s Sean you.EMPHATIC 3sm kiss.vn
    ‘I want Sean to kiss you.’

(53) is expected, but (52) is a mystery. It is worth noting that the “possessive” pronoun in (52) may not, in fact, be
reflective of an underlying VN+genitive structure. In Irish, overt agreement and overt nominals are in complementary
distribution. One can have agreement morphology on the verb (54a) or\[28\] an overt noun (54b), but not both (54c):

(54) a. Tái mó\[r
    be.PRES.1s big
    ‘I am big.’

b. Tá mé mó\[r
    be.PRES 1s big
    ‘I am big.’

c. ʻTáim mé mó\[r
    be.PRES 1s big
    ‘I am big.’

---

\[27\] In Scottish Gaelic this surfaces as the more transparent \[′ga (ag+\(a\))\].

\[28\] Only certain tenses and persons allow the “synthetic” agreeing form. The first person of the verb \[t\(a\)\] in (54) is rare in that it allows either (but not both).
In most forms, when an overt nominal subject is present, either no ending is present or a default third person form is found. McCloskey and Hale (1984) argue that possessive pronouns in construct state constructions bear the hallmarks of agreement morphology in Irish. They are in complementary distribution with overt nouns. The pronominal object morphemes in (52) take precisely the same form. In cases where we have an overt shifted object pronoun like (53), the “agreement” morpheme (which we’ve now identified with Telic, following Ramchand (1993) and Kratzer (2004)), takes a default 3SM form and shows the anti-agreement effect, supporting this analysis. Thus, we can assume then that the overt “possessive pronouns” are in fact simply agreement morphology reflecting a null pronoun, as part of the general anti-agreement system in the language.

One might take the “possessive” nature of these pronouns to be indicative of an underlying genitive case on the null pronoun. However, there is an argument to be made that these are the forms that agreement morphology would take quite independently of the case marking of the actual null argument. The genitive pronouns also appear in static unaccusative constructions where the subject has shifted over the verbal noun.

\[(55) \text{Tá mé k i mo shuí } t_k.\]

```
be_pres I stat my sit.vn
```

'I am sitting.'

Note that in this example we have a possessive pronoun agreeing with a trace. The trace either lacks case entirely, or shares common case with the shifted pronoun that is its antecedent. We get the possessive pronominal form even though we can see the underlying object/surface subject is in its common case form. A similar but slightly weaker argument can be made with examples like (53). The agreement morpheme is in its anti-agreement 3SM possessive form, even though the null element that it is (not) agreeing with is the trace of a pronoun bearing common case. The fact that the forms in (52) are called “possessive” pronouns in the traditional descriptive literature then misses an underlying generalization that they show up in contexts where genitive case is not being assigned.

6. Conclusions

This paper has investigated the behavior of mixed categories from the perspective of Irish verbal noun constructions. Absolute definitions of part speech like those of Baker (2003) fall apart in light of the mixed behavior of verbal noun categories. Part of the account comes from B&K’s insight that outwardly nominal and inwardly verbal behaviors of VNs fall out from the presence of nominal functional categories dominating verbal structure. The nominal behavior of argument verbal nouns (AVNs) follows nicely from this. However, PVNs do not work the same way. Indeed their behavior is exactly what we would expect if they do not have nominal functional categories at all, but are simply untensed verbs. An exception to this is the case marking of the objects of certain limited types of PVNs, which exhibit genitive morphology. I suggested an alternative account of this morphology. I suggest that genitive case is a last resort repair strategy, encoded in a dissociated morpheme condition in the Distributed Morphology framework. Like Chomsky’s (1981) rule of “of insertion,” this rule is invoked when there is no other case assigner for the DP. This provides an explanation of the unexpected case marking with these forms.

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