Irish Existentials
in Context

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1   INTRODUCTION

M^Y GOALS IN THIS PAPER are modest. In the first place, I would like to establish some of the analysis of existential constructions in Irish and by so doing to contribute to the comparative typology of existential constructions. At a slightly more ambitious level, I want to use those initial results to engage some of the issues that have shaped the attempt to understand existential constructions more generally. Understanding how existential constructions work involves disentangling a complicated knot of interactions among syntactic, semantic, lexical and pragmatic factors. But much of the work that has grappled with these difficult questions has centered on languages of the same general typological cut as English. And looking only at English, or at languages which work in a similar way, it is hard to disentangle which factors contribute to which observed effect. Consider one such issue—the so-called 'definiteness effect' in existentials (illustrated in (1)), which has been at the heart of work on existentials at least since Milsark 1974:

(1)   There were *most people/*all students/few students/many students/?those students/?the students at the meeting.

Certain kinds of nominals are excluded from the post-verbal position; certain others are favored in that position; for a third class, the relevant examples are variable in status and judgments about their acceptability are highly and subtly context-dependent. Understanding the patterns in (1) has been a complicated matter. One might in principle, for instance, attribute the definiteness effect to the presence of the element *there*, or to the post-verbal (and therefore non-canonical) position of the subject, or to the particular array of semantic and pragmatic effects that existential structures are used by speakers to convey. Or one might perhaps seek to understand it by appealing to selectional properties of the verb *be*.

Looking at languages in which the relevant syntactic structures are substantially different from those of English or other well-studied languages can help separate out the contributions of these various factors. In particular, we can ask: as a given aspect of the morphosyntax of an existential structure is varied, which aspects of the semantics and pragmatics co-vary, and which aspects remain constant? Running this kind of natural experiment should help us make some useful deductions about how the various pieces of the existential puzzle fit together and how those pieces interact.

Behind all of this lurks the question of whether or not there is an 'existential construction,' or if the observed properties of the various sentence-types called existential in various
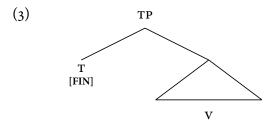
languages can be understood as emerging from the interplay between lexical properties and general principles of syntactic and semantic composition. When one looks at the structures called 'existential' in a range of languages and language-types, it is hard not to be struck by certain commonalities. But saying what the roots of those commonalities might be is, of course, a different matter.

2   Preliminaries: Clause Structure

For Irish, it will be useful to begin with some of the basics of clause-structure, so that when we consider existential structures specifically, there will be a larger context into which that information can be integrated. As is well known, Irish shows rigid vso order in its finite clauses:

(2)   Thóg sí teach daofa   ar an Mhullach Dubh.
       raised she house for-them on the
       'She built a house for them in Mullaghduff.'

It now seems clear that such clauses reflect a syntactic structure like that in (3):

(3)

In (3) the finite Tense element has a complement which contains vp, the maximal verbal projection, within which all of the arguments of the verb (complements and subject) are initially realized. The schematic structure in (3) is related to the pronounced string in (2) by way of an operation (head-movement, or Wescoat's (2002) 'lexical sharing') which merges the contents of t and of v in the position of t. I will not try to lay out here all the evidence for this overall view (that has been discussed elsewhere), except to say that it lets us understand a large body of observation which collectively suggests that all of the material following the finite verb in a finite clause like (2) forms a syntactic constituent (see McCloskey 1983, 1991, 2011). More relevant at present is the fact that these assumptions let us understand the relations among finite clauses, non-finite clauses, and small clauses. The operation which combines the contents of Tense and the contents of v to form an inflected verb does not apply in non-finite clauses. As a

consequence, the skeletal structure in (3) emerges with subject-initial and verb-medial order[1]:

(4) Níor mhaith leis sin tarlú an chéad uair eile.
would-not-be-good with-him that happen [-FIN] the first time other
'He wouldn't like that to happen the next time.' RNG 15-1-06

(4) illustrates an intransitive clause. In transitive non-finite clauses, there is in addition obligatory Object Shift, which means that what ultimately results is SOVX order (in the dialects with which we will be mostly concerned here):

(5) B'fhearr liom [tú iad a dhíol le mo dheartháir].
would-be-better with-me you them sell [-FIN] with my brother
'I'd prefer for you to sell them to my brother.'

Verb-medial, subject-initial orders are also found in small clauses (tense-less predicational structures) and since such clauses will be of concern to us shortly, something should be said about their structure. The syntax of small clauses is easier to investigate in Irish than in many other languages because of one crucial syntactic trait: non-finite clauses and small clauses freely allow overt subjects which are accusative in form (McCloskey 1986, McCloskey & Sells 1988). This is illustrated for non-finite clauses in (6):

(6) a. Bheinn sásta iad an obair a dhéanamh
I-would-be happy them the work do [-FIN]
'I would be happy for them to do the work.' .

b. Tharlódh é a bheith suimiúil.
happen [COND] it [ACC] be [-FIN] interesting
'It could happen that it would be interesting.' IA 481

c. ráingig an uair seo í a bheith i gContae an Chláir
come-about [PAST] the time DEMON her be [-FIN] in County the Clare
'It came about at this time that she was in County Clare.' PF 109

But small clauses also allow this possibility (see Chung & McCloskey 1987):

(7) a. Ó tharla eisean chomh druidte sin,
since happen [PAST] him so closed DEMON
'since he happened to be so closed' EB 171

b. má tharla é fuar amuigh an oíche seo
if happen [PAST] it [ACC] cold out this-night
'if it happened to be cold out tonight' TGC 139

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[1]Many of the examples used in this paper have been taken from published sources of one kind or another. When this is the case, it is indicated by way of a tag which consists of an abbreviation of the title of the publication followed by the page number on which it appears, or the date of broadcast in the case of material from radio. The abbreviations used are explained in the Appendix.

c. ó tharla é san uisce agus san aer
since happen [PAST] it [ACC] in-the water and in-the air
'since it happened that it was in the water and in the air' TD 303

d. ba mhinic iad ag tógáil tithe sna bailte móra
was often them raise [PROG] houses in-the towns big
'they were often building houses in the big cities' SGC 21

An important consequence of the availability of this case-licensing mechanism, as we might expect given Case Theory in its classical form, is that small clauses and non-finite clauses with overt subjects are not restricted in their distribution as they are in many other languages. In English, subjects of defective clauses are dependent on elements external to the clause itself for their case licensing. Therefore the clauses of which they are subjects can appear only in a very restricted range of syntactic contexts. For the most part, they will appear only in the local domain of case-assigners (so that their subjects can in turn be licensed by those external case-assigners). However in a language which possesses a mechanism for the case-licensing of such subjects independent of the external context, small clauses and non-finite clauses with overt subjects should appear in a broader range of syntactic contexts—in discourse isolation, for instance, as in (8):

(8) a. Bhí an t-ardeaspag ag teacht. É gléasta go niamhrach, agus é
was the archbishop come [PROG] him dressed resplendently and him
á thiomáint i *Mercedes*
being-driven in
'The archbishop was coming. He was dressed resplendently and he was being driven in a Mercedes (*lit* him dressed resplendently and him being driven in a Mercedes). SR 19

(9) Mhair sé ina aonar, é singil, é neamspleách
live [PAST] he alone him single him independent
'He lived alone—single and independent (*lit* him single; him independent)' GLL 97

or as complements to the adjectives or adverbs of (8d), and as complements to unaccusative verbs, as in (8a–c). Such possibilities are excluded in English because adjectival and unaccusative predicates cannot license Case on (the specifier of) their complements. They are not, however, excluded in Irish. The same mechanisms make possible the absolute construction with *agus* ('and') illustrated in (10):

(10) agus iad ar an bhealach 'na bhaile
and them on the road home
'while they were on the way home'

A consequence of this syntactic quirk is that Irish small clauses are more easily manipulated in ways that are useful to the syntactician than are their English counterparts (see Chung & McCloskey 1987 for extensive discussion). All of this will be useful to us here, since it turns out that there is a small clause at the heart of every existential in the language.

3   EXISTENTIALS: THE BASICS

Irish existentials seem both familiar and unfamiliar when first encountered. The examples of (11) illustrate their core properties:

(11)   a.   Beidh   go leor bia   ann.
            be [FUT] plenty food in-it
            'There'll be plenty of food.'

       b.   Tá   daoine ann nach mbeadh   sásta   glacadh   leis.
            be [PRES] people in-it NEG C be [COND] satisfied take [-FIN] with-it
            'There are people who would not be willing to accept it.'

       c.   ní   raibh   aon ghluaisteán an uair sin ann.
            NEG be [PAST] any car   that-time in it
            'There were no cars in those days.'   FEB51

       d.   Do   bhí   triúr driothár ann agus iad   pósta.
            [PAST] be [PAST] three brother in-it and them married
            'There were three brothers and they were married …   SOOT 92

In each case we have a form of the verb *to be*, followed by a nominal which corresponds to what has been called the 'pivot' in discussions of the English existential, followed by the element *ann*. Since this latter element is the most distinctive piece of the Irish existential, we should begin by trying to understand it. At least historically, *ann* is the 3rd person singular non-feminine form of the preposition meaning *in* and so might be translated 'in it'.[2] Of more interest in the present context, though, is the fact that this form of the preposition has a use as a locative deictic, as illustrated in (12), for example:

(12)   a.   Cuireadh ann muid dhá bhliain ó shin.
            were-sent in-it us   two year   ago
            'We were sent there two years ago.'

       b.   Pósadh   i Meiriceá é,   agus tá sé ann ó shin.
            was-married in America him and is he there since
            'He got married in America, and he has been there ever since.'

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[2]For discussion of the historical development, see Greene 1976.

As can be seen in (12), *ann* in this use can be either directional (as in (12a)), or locative (as in (12b)). Given the considerable body of work that has been done on the typology of existential constructions (Lyons 1967, 1968, Clark 1978, Kuno 1971, Freeze 1992, Hoekstra & Mulder 1990, Musan 1996, Dobrovie-Sorin 1997) it hardly comes as a surprise that existential clauses should involve expressions of location. The challenge, though, is to say exactly what syntactic and semantic function is served by the locative expression. We can begin that investigation with the rudimentary syntactic schema in (13), which subsumes all of the examples in (11):

(13)   [tá   DP   *ann*   ]

I will use the term 'existential predicate' to refer to *ann* and I will occasionaly call DP of (13) the 'pivot'. The first conclusion to be established is that the presence of the verb *to be* in (13) is in no sense essential in establishing the distinctive syntax, semantics, and pragmatics of the existential construction. In fact, the sequence [DP *ann*], interpreted as an existential, has a distribution entirely independent of the verb *tá*—selected, for example, by a range of other verbs, some transitive, some unaccusative:

(14)   a.   Fágann sin cuid mhór daoine ann nach bhfuil fáil   acu   ar sheirbhísí
              leaves   that many   people in-it NEG C is   access at-them on services
              leighis
              healing[GEN]
              'That means that there are many people who are without access to health ser-
              vices.'

        b.   ó   tharla   trathnóna breá ann
              since happened evening   fine in-it
              'since it happened to be a fine evening'   TGC 96

More strikingly, this sequence appears in all of the small clause contexts documented in Chung & McCloskey 1987. Here, investigation is aided by the syntactic quirk discussed in section 2, namely that small clauses have a much broader distribution in Irish than they do in English, a property we have attributed to the existence of an internal mechanism for licensing accusative case on their subjects. It turns out that the sequence [DP *ann*] appears in the full range of syntactic contexts characteristic of small clauses—as complement, for instance, to those non-verbal predicates known independently to select small clauses:

(15)   a.   Ba   mhinic cásanna den   chineál sin   ann
              COP[PAST] often cases   of-the type   DEMON in-it
              'There were often cases of that type'   IDG 149

    b.   Is   maith na bádaí beaga ann.
          COP[PRES] good the boats small in-it
          'It's a good thing that there are the small boats.'   TD 4

    c.   Is   annamh baisteach ann.
          COP[PRES] rare   rain   in-it
          'There's rarely (any) rain.'   DO 196

It also occurs in the absolutive construction with *agus* illustrated in (10) above:

(16)   agus an oíche ann
        and the night in-it
        'now that it was night'   SSPG 16

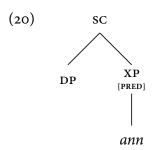And the same sequence may appear in discourse isolation:

(17)   a.   An charraig chomh fada anois ann gur …
         the rock   so   long now   in-it c
         'The rock so long in existence now that …'   AFAP 142

    b.   Gan an sceach   gheal uaigneach féin ann
         NEG the hawthorn white lonely   even in-it
         'There wasn't even the lonely white hawthorn.'   FNDG 21

What these observations collectively indicate is that there is in the language a syntactic constituent of the form in (18):

(18)   [DP *ann*]

which has the internal structure and external distribution of a small clause, which may appear as a root constituent (as in (17)), and which is available for selection by a broad range of lexical items, verbal and non-verbal. The distinctive property of the verb *tá* is that it selects small clause complements. It is therefore unsurprising that the constituent described in (18), should appear as its complement. Given this much, we can refine (13) to (19):

(19)   [tá [DP *ann*]]

We seem to be dealing, then, with structures like the schematic (20):[3]

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[3] (20) is meant as an expositional and visual aid, not as a serious proposal about the syntax of small clauses. I have nothing to add here to the various proposals that have been made in that regard.

(20)   SC
                      /   \
                   DP   XP
                           [PRED]
                             |
                            ann

We find confirming support for the claim that *ann* is a predicate in another aspect of its distri-
bution. Here, the crucial observation is that *ann* may appear in one of the predicative copula
constructions, one which has the schematic structure in (21). Here XP is a non-verbal predica-
tive phrase and DP (preceded by the dative prepostion *do*) is its subject (Doherty 1996, 1997,
Carnie 1995, DeGraff 1997, Legate 1997, 1998, Ramchand 1996, Adger & Ramchand 2003, Mc-
Closkey 2005, Lash 2011):

(21)   [Tense   XP   *do*+DP]
                          [PRED]

(22)   a.   Ní   ar an saol seo   dhom a thuilleadh
            NEG-COP[PRES] on the life DEMON to-me anymore
            'I am no longer of this world.'   AGMTS 2

       b.   Má-s   pósta   dhó
            if-COP[PRES] married to-him
            'if he's married'   LNT 96

       c.   is   dócha   nach   saor domsa
            COP[PRES] probable NEG-COP[PRES] free to-me
            'I am probably not free.'   BOM 38

       d.   ag rá   gur   beo fós do Phresley
            say [PROG] C-COP[PRES] alive still to Presley
            'saying that Presley is still alive'   DII 31

Among the predicative expressions which may appear in this context is existential *ann*:

(23)   a.   Déarfá   gur–bh   ann ariamh di.
            you-would-say C–COP[PRES] in-it always to-her
            'You would say that she had always existed.'   AFAP 141

       b.   mothaíonn tú gur–b   ann duit   anseo
            feel [PRES]   you C–COP[PRES] in-it to-you here
            'You feel that you (really) exist here.'   AFAP 115

       c.   nuair nach   ann do cháipéisí
            when NEG–COP[PRES] in-it to documents
            'When there are no documents'   PNG 572

The syntax here seems, on the face of it, to be very different from that of the small clause predications we examined earlier. However exactly it is to be ultimately understood, what is clear is that the observations fall partly into place if we take *ann* to be, as suggested by (19) and (20), a predicative expression and one which should therefore appear in the normal range of contexts permitted to predicative expressions more generally—among them the type illustrated in (21) and (22), and the small clause type discussed earlier.

This conclusion is further supported by the observation that in the small clause contexts already discussed, the existential predicate is in complementary distribution with other predicates, a pattern we should expect given that in small clauses there is exactly one 'subject' DP and exactly one predicate. This pattern of complementarity is sometimes obscured by the dual use of locative expressions—as predicates and as modifiers:

(24)   Tá   daoine ar an bhaile nach mbeannochadh sa   tsráid duit.
        be [PRES] people on the town   NEG C greet [COND]   in-the street to-you
        'There are people in the town who wouldn't say hello you in the street.'

(25)   Tá   daoine ann ar an bhaile nach mbeannochadh sa   tsráid duit.
        be [PRES] people in-it on the town   NEG C greet [COND]   in-the street to-you
        'There are people in the town who wouldn't say hello you in the street.

(25) is perfectly grammatical, but this is because existential *ann* can be understood as the single predicate licensed in the small clause complement to *tá*, but the PP headed by *ar* ('on') can still be understood as a locative modifier. As pointed out to me by Joey Sabbagh, however, we can control for this confound by using, in addition to existential *ann*, a PP which has no use as a modifier. The PP in (26a) is just such an expression, and in this circumstance, the pattern of complementarity emerges with some clarity:

(26)   a.   Tá leabhar ag mo dheirfiúr.
              is book   at my sister
              'My sister has a book.'

        b.   *Tá leabhar ann ag mo dheirfiúr.
              is book   in-it at my sister

(26b) fails because two exclusively predicative expressions compete to be the single predicate allowed in the small clause. Observe finally that Irish forbids so-called 'bare existentials':

(27)   a.   There's no bread.

        b.   Níl   arán   ar bith ann.
              is-not bread any   in-it
              'There's no bread.'

    c. *Níl   arán ar bith.
        is-not bread any
        'There's no bread.'

That is: structures with predicative *ann* in Irish serve the range of functions served in English by bare existentials. Put another way: codas are obligatory in Irish existential structures.[4]

If existential *ann* is predicative, finally, we can understand another contrast between the existential structures of Irish and those of English. The English example in (28):

(28)   There are many parks in Wellington.

is at least potentially ambiguous between a parse on which the PP *in Wellington* is the predicate of a small clause complement of *be* and a parse on which it is a frame adverbial modifying a bare existential. (29) removes the potential ambiguity:

(29)   In Wellington, there are many parks.

Corresponding to the Irish existential in (30a), however, there is no variant like (30b):

(30)   a.   Níl   tae ar bith ann.
           is-not tea any   in-it
           'There's no tea.'

       b.   *Ann, níl tae ar bith.

This contrast too falls into place if existential *ann* is exclusively predicative.

If existential *ann* is a predicate, we can further ask what kind of predicate it is. One of the answers to that question is that it seems to be a stage-level predicate (in the sense of Carlson 1977). We already saw that *ann* appears routinely as the predicate of small clause complements to the verb *tá* ('be'). But Stenson (1981: 94–95) and Doherty (1996), both building on a long tradition of observation, argue that such complements are always stage-level.[5] If that is true, then existential *ann* is presumably stage-level, consistent with an old intuition about existential claims.

There may seem to be some tension between this conclusion and the observations at (22) and (23) above, since there is a general consensus in the relevant literature that the copula *is* may combine only with individual-level predicates. The tension is only apparent, however. It is probably true that the copula, in the use illustrated in (31), in which the subject of the predication is accusative, selects only individual level predicates:

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[4]It has been claimed (see for instance Francez 2007: Chap. 2, p. 11) that codas are always optional.

[5]See also Carnie 1995 and for discussion of similar effects in Scottish Gaelic Adger & Ramchand 2003: 333-4, where an interpretation is suggested in terms of the presence of an eventuality variable in those predicates which may appear in the complement of *tá*.

(31)   Is   ceoltóir   cumasach é,
        PRES musician powerful   him
        'He is a powerful musician.'

This predication-type (with an accusative subject), along with the restrictions that it is subject to, has been much studied for the Gaelic languages, but the type in (22), in which the subject is marked with the dative preposition *do*, has not, as far as I know, been discussed before. And it is clear that the difference in case-marking of the subject correlates with an important semantic difference, in that the dative type illustrated in (22) above is not exclusively individual-level. It would take more work than I can do here to establish whether or not the dative type requires, or simply allows, stage-level predicates in its complement.[6] Allow them, however, it certainly does. So the appearance of existential *ann* in this construction is consistent with its characterization as stage-level. Furthermore, the impossibility of (32):

(32)   *Is   ann na cáipéisí.
        PRES in-it the documents
        'The documents exist.'

(in which existential ANN appears in the accusative type) is understandable if existential *ann* is stage-level and if the standard view is correct that copula constructions with accusative subjects are necessarily individual-level. There is obviously a great deal of hard and delicate work to be done if all of this is to be put on a sound footing, but two conclusions seem warranted— existential *ann* is clearly a predicate and, to the extent that these matters are understood at present, *ann* patterns with stage-level rather than with individual level predicates.

Returning to the central theme, however, it also now follows that existential clauses in Irish of the type in (13) always involve small clause structures, in some of which (corresponding to bare existentials in English) the predicate is the distinguished element *ann*, and in others of which some more routine predicative XP appears.[7]

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[6]Relevant for that investigation, particularly in the context of Ramchand 1996 and Adger & Ramchand 2003, is the impossibility of nominal predicates with dative subjects:

(i)   *Is   ceoltóir   cumasach dó.
        PRES musician powerful   to-him
        'He's a powerful musician.'

In the system of those papers, the impossibility of (i) would imply an obligatory restriction to stage-level predication (though they eschew the terms 'stage-level' and 'individual-level' and the semantic analysis implied by them.).

[7]As pointed out by a reviewer, an issue now arises about whether or not examples with a predicate other than *ann* (like (24) or (26), for instance) are or are not existentials. The issue may be terminological rather than substantive. If there is more at stake than nomenclature, then the crucial questions have to do with whether or not the semantic and pragmatic effects considered in Sections 4, 7 and 8 below (effects which we ultimately at-

   If it is established that existential *ann* is a syntactic predicate of a certain type, we can go on to ask about its semantic content. We might in fact begin by asking whether or not it has any semantic content. Given its apparent kinship with English *there*, which is often taken to be a semantically empty (expletive) element, one could ask if Irish *ann* were not similarly a semantically empty (expletive) predicate. Such elements might exist, although I do not know of any convincing examples. We needn't pursue the matter, though, since there is strong evidence that the existential predicate in Irish is not in fact semantically empty. We will see some additional evidence for this conclusion at a later point in the discussion, but for now, the crucial observation is that *ann* in its existential use can be focused. This possibility is seen in the examples in (34), which involve the cleft construction. The pragmatic function of a cleft is, in general, to express contrastive focus.

(33)   Ba   i nDoire a rugadh   é.
        COP[PAST] in Derry C was-born him
        'It was in Derry that he was born.'

In an example such as (33), an alternative-set of places in which he might have been born is introduced, and the assertion is that in just one of those places was he actually born. Consider in that light the examples in (34) [8]:

(34)   a.   Ba   ann a bhí   an saol neamh-bhuartha an t-am sin.
              COP[PAST] in -it C be [PAST] the life untroubled   the time that
              'It really is true that there was an untroubled life at that time.'   RGB 71

        b.   B'   ann a bhí   a' chuideachta   a' teacht   'na bhaile ón
              COP[PAST] in -it C be [PAST] the good-company come [PROG] home   from-the
              aonach,
              fair
              'There really was good company as we came home from the fair.'   CAS 35

Such examples are difficult to render naturally in English translation, but they are not difficult to understand and they have, as we will see, a natural interpretation in terms of the standard

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tribute to interpretative properties of *ann*) extend fully to examples like (24) and (26), which are built around non-existential predicates. This is an important question, but resolving it is an extremely delicate matter empirically and I am unfortunately not in a position to pursue it here. If it turns out that the crucial effects also turn up in such examples, then there must be an additional compositional path which leads to them. One would then need to ask what that path is. Initial indications, though, are that the effects do not hold. As far as I know, for instance, there is no reason to think that the definiteness effect as discussed in Sections 5 and 7 belows holds in general for examples of the type in (24) and (26). The matter deserves a thorough discussion though.

   [8] I am grateful to Lillis Ó Laoire for a very helpful discussion of the interpretive properties of examples such as those of (34).

semantics/pragmatics of contrastive focus.[9] A way of understanding, say, (34a) is that it makes salient an alternative set consisting of two propositions—that an untroubled life was in existence at that time and that an untroubled life was not in existence at that time. Further, it is used to assert the former. If this is even roughly right, it must be that Irish *ann*, but not English *there*, is semantically contentful. Compare (34) with the thorough impossibility of English (35):

(35)   *It was there that was plenty of food.

There is presumably no syntactic flaw in (35), given (36):

(36)   It was Sally that was the competent one.

However, there is a natural semantic-pragmatic explanation for what goes so badly wrong in (35). If the post-copula position of a cleft structure is reserved for elements which can be contrastively focused, then the element that occupies that position had better have the kind of semantic content which can support the construction of the appropriate alternative-set. If the nominal *there* lacks all semantic content, it cannot fulfill this function. But from this line of reasoning it follows in turn that the well-formedness of (34) must indicate that Irish *ann* does in fact have the kind of semantic content which would support the construction of the needed alternative set. We will develop a proposal at a later point about what that content might be, but at this point we are in a position to understand a further contrast between English expletive *there* and Irish *ann*. In Irish, *ann* never appears in presentational clauses such as (37):

(37)   Ghaibh   chucha suas an cnoc fear maol gan   aon chluas air.
          move [PAST] to-them up   the hill man bald without any ear   on-him
          'There came towards them up the hill a bald man who had no ears.'   SOCA 102

Such structures show the empty post-verbal subject positions expected of a null subject language or of a language in which the EPP is at least partially inactive. If *ann* is exclusively predicative and semantically contentful, its failure to appear in presentational structures such as (37) is expected.

    The general conclusion, then, must be that *ann* is a predicate which has semantic content (stage-level) and that its semantic content is uniquely appropriate for the expression of existential propositions.

    It is tempting at this point to make a connection with the work of Moro (1989, 1997), who argues that English *there* originates as the predicate of a small clause and raises to the specifier position of T under EPP pressure. On this view, Irish and English existentials would have a

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[9] In addition to the interpretation discussed in the text, examples like (34) also have, unsurprisingly, an interpretation on which *ann* is a deictic locative. Consultants are clear about this ambiguity.

great deal of their structure in common (they would in effect share underlying forms), the principal difference between the two flowing from the different status of the EPP in the two languages (always active in English, never or only occasionally active in Irish). I have nothing definitive to say here about this way of making a link between the existential structures of the two languages, but I want to offer two observations that I think are relevant to assessing the viability of this class of proposals.

The first has to do with interpretation. The contrast explored above between (34) and (35) suggests that there is an important difference between Irish *ann* and English *there*: the former has semantic content, the latter does not (as is traditionally assumed). If these conclusions are correct and if we identify Irish *ann* with English *there* in its pre-movement position, then we must construct the raising analysis for English in such a way that the semantic content of predicative *there* is voided as a consequence of raising. It would surely be possible to develop the needed technology, but it is hardly clear that this is a theoretical possibility that we should countenance.

Also relevant for this discussion are certain structures found in Irish varieties of English, illustrated in (38):

(38)   a.   There's no mistake in it. Salmon is good.

       b.   There was only the one bit of snow in it last year.

       c.   There's no doubt in it.

(39)   There's people in it wouldn't give you the time of day.

(39) corresponds to standard English (40):

(40)   There are people who wouldn't give you the time of day.

In these varieties, then, existential sentences have, or may have, the schematic form in (41):

(41)   *there* T *be* DP *in-it*

The phenomenon illustrated in (38) and (39) is widespread in the varieties of English spoken in Ireland and has been much discussed in the dialectological literature—especially in Filppula's comprehensive study (Filppula 1999: 227–228), from which the examples in (38) are taken; (39) is from my own observation. There is no doubt that the syntactic pattern illustrated in (38) and (39) derives from the Irish structures that we are exploring here. What they indicate is that in the language-contact situations in which Irish varieties of English were forged, Irish *ann* is not identified with English *there*; rather a newly-minted predicative PP is innovated to fulfill the function served by *ann* in the Irish substrate. It is not obvious how to interpret

the evidence of such linguistic transfers, but two observations seem warranted. The first is that Hiberno-English *in it*, like its Irish source, has semantic content; Bliss (1984) and Henry (1957), both perceptive observers, assign the meaning 'in existence' to *in it* in this use. The second observation is that it is hard to see how *there* in (38) and (39) could have raised from the predicate position of the small clause complement of *be*, since that position is occupied by the PP *in it*. Yet we hardly want to say that *there* in these Hiberno-English varieties has an entirely different syntax from the instance of *there* found in 'standard' English.[10]

Returning now to our principal theme, however, we can pull together the threads of the discussion so far as follows: Irish possesses a non-verbal existential predicate *ann* which, while homophonous with, and diachronically related to, a locative anaphor, is clearly today a distinct lexical item, whose semantic content is uniquely appropriate for the expression of existential propositions. Since this predicate has semantic content, it may be focused, and further it shows the characteristic distribution of a stage-level predicate, appearing either in certain predicative copula constructions, or else as the predicate of a small clause.

With this much in place, we can begin to redeem one of the promissory notes made at the beginning of the paper, by asking how many of the familiar properties of existential structures remain constant in this very language-particular setting and what kinds of differences emerge. This should put is in a position to make some useful deductions about how the various pieces of the existential puzzle fit together and how those pieces interact. Crucial in this will be the question of what contribution the existential predicate *ann* makes to the composition of the existential proposition. We begin that investigation in the following section.

4   Context and Location

Many studies of the meaning of existential sentences have made a link between their semantic properties and the semantics of location, where 'location' is often understood metaphorically (see, for instance, Musan 1996 and Dobrovie-Sorin 1997). A particularly influential strand of

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[10] The construction in (41) exhibits a number of restrictions which should repay closer investigation. Although (i) is surprisingly impossible:

(i)   *No tea is in it.

the subject position may be occupied by the trace of Ā-movement, as shown in (ii):

(ii)   a.   Given the day that's in it, we really shouldn't be at work at all.
         b.   She was wearing ashes on her forehead, because of the day that was in it.
         c.   I just feel lucky to have a job at all, in the times that are in it.

work along these lines has been that pursued by Barbara Partee and Vladimir Borchev in a series of recent papers whose focus is on Russian and on the distribution of genitive case in that language (Borschev & Partee 1998, 2001, Partee & Borschev 2002, 2004, 2006, 2007). A core commitment of this body of work is that existential claims are strongly context-dependent, in the sense that they are always made relative to some location—a location which is sometimes metaphorical, which is often implicit and given by the context, but which nonetheless always functions as the perspectival center.

A very similar intuition is developed by Musan (1996: 177):

> I assume that *there* is of a basically definite or deictic nature and indicates to the addressee that he should direct his attention to some location (in a wide sense) that is usually contextually-specified (Lumsden: 1988:227ff). …

As shown in detail by Francez 2010, it is this property of context-dependence which ensures that those who use existentials are not in general committed to strong existential claims. (42) can be uttered truly and appropriately even in a context in which it is clear that tea exists in the world and in which this truth is taken for granted by all who take part in the conversation:

(42)   There was no tea.

An utterance of (42) asserts only that some salient context or location is such that it includes no instances of the kind *tea*. This is why (43) is not contradictory:

(43)   There was no tea, so we had to buy some.

Two questions at least arise at this point: (i) What is the content of this contextual restriction? (ii) What is the source of that content in the composition of existential structures?

For the first question, the most substantive and empirically successful set of proposals currently available, as far as I know, is due to Itamar Francez (2007, 2009, 2010). Francez 2009 shows that the relevant effect is similar to, but crucially distinct from, the normal process of contextual domain restriction for natural language quantifiers. It is distinct from that process in affecting the scope set, rather than the restrictor, of the generalized quantifier denoted by the nominal in pivot position. Fixing the value of the restricting set requires the retrieval of two pieces of information from context: a familiar (inanimate) individual a and a binary relation R. The contextual restriction imposed in the existential, then, corresponds to the set of things which stand in the relation R to the familiar individual a, where the presupposition of familiarity is just that regularly associated with definite expressions. We can illustrate the workings of the proposal informally by considering the fragment of dialogue in (44):

(44)   SPEAKER A: Why didn't you make breakfast?

        SPEAKER B: There was no tea.

        SPEAKER A: You could've bought some.

For the existential used by speaker B in (44), a likely candidate for the salient individual *a* is the shared home of the two interlocutors, and a plausible candidate for the relation *R* is the location relation. The content of the contextual restriction, then, can be represented as in (45):

(45) $\lambda x[\ R(x, a)]$

In the case of (44), when appropriate values for *R* and *a* are supplied by the context of use, (45) comes to denote the set of things which are located in the shared home of the two speakers. Speaker B in the exchange of (44) is in turn then taken to assert that the intersection of the set of things in the home with the set of things which instantiate the kind *tea* was null.[11] Crucially, no general claim about the non-existence of *tea* is forced.

If we accept this general approach to the content of the contextual restriction, we can address the second question—what is the source of this content in the composition of existential propositions? There are three approaches that I know of.

Borchev and Partee offer the schematic semantic analysis in (46) for existential sentences in general:

(46)   BE (THING, LOC)

The element BE in (46) is a cover-term for the class of unaccusative and semantically bleached verbs which support the genitive of negation in impersonal constructions in Russian. The LOCation argument is the source of the contextual dependence of existentials, since it follows from (46) that existential claims are always made relative to a particular, if metaphorical, location. On this view then, the contextual restriction whose content we have interpreted as in (45), following Francez, originates as an implicit argument of the existential verb.[12]

For Bende-Farkas 1999 and for Musan 1996, on the other hand, the relevant restriction originates as part of the content of the element *there* (or the sequence *there be*) in English.

Finally, Francez (2007, 2009, 2010) argues that the content of (45) originates as an implicit argument of the pivot nominal. This is one aspect of a more general claim that the pivot nominal acts as the main predicate (in semantic terms at least) in existential structures.

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[11] To be strictly accurate, within the system of Francez 2010, *a* in (45b) will be a location and *R* the sub-location relation.

[12] To be more precise, in the analysis of Francez 2010, it is the familiar individual *a* which is the implicit argument (a definite null anaphor), the relation *R* being supplied by more general mechanisms of pragmatic inference.

With this much as background, we can return to existentials in Irish. It will surely come as no surprise, to begin with, that the kind of context dependence under discussion here is also a feature of existential structures in Irish. When the example in (47) [13]was used in a recent radio-broadcast:

(47)   Tá   easpa salainn   ann.
       be [PRES] lack   salt [GEN] in-it
       'There's a shortage of salt.'

the journalist who used it was not thereby committed to any large or global claim about short-ages of salt. Quite the opposite in fact; the question under discussion when (47) was uttered was why, in the absence of any general shortage of salt in the world or in the country, there was not enough salt in that place (County Donegal) at that time (during a severe snow-storm) to keep roads clear.

If the facts of context dependence in existentials are no different in Irish than they are in English, we can go on to ask if any of the approaches to context dependence outlined above can help us better understand how context dependence manifests itself in Irish existentials. The answer is that neither the first nor the second can.

Consider first the possibility that the contextual restriction has its origin in an implicit argument of the existential verb. At the core of our considerations so far has been the idea that existential structures in the language involve an existential predicate *ann* which combines with a DP to form predicative or small clause structures—small clauses which can in turn be deployed in many contexts which lack a selecting verb or predicate. Yet even in the absence of any governing verb, such structures share all relevant properties (context dependence espe-cially) with existentials in other languages. For instance, the discussion of which (47) was an actual part might well have continued as in (48):

(48)   a.   Cad chuige nach bhfuil   salann dhá chur   ar na bealtaí?
            what-reason NEG C be [PRES] salt   spread [PROG-PASS] on the roads
            'Why isn't salt being spread on the roads?'

       b.   Cionn is nach ann don   tsalann.
            because NEG C in-it to-the salt
            'Because there is no salt.'

(48b) has the same local and context-dependent interpretation as (47); it does not commit a speaker who uses it to the belief that salt does not exist. Here, though, there is no verb to be, and the syntax is probably very different from the syntax of (47). What (47) and (48) have

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[13]*Barrscéalta*, Raidió na Gaeltachta, Tuesday morning, December 7th 2010.

in common, of course, is the pivot nominal and also the predicative expression *ann*. If these conclusions are right, it is unlikely that properties of an 'existential verb' such as BE of (46) can be the source of the context dependence in Irish existentials (whatever about how things work in other languages).

Nor is there an expletive element in Irish existentials in any of their variants (see McCloskey 1996 for general discussion and see the following section for more particular discussion of existential structures). We must therefore seek the source of context-dependence in the composition of the pivot nominal with the existential predicate *ann*, since only these elements are essential to the building of an existential proposition in Irish. That leaves three possibilities:

- the contextual restriction is part of the meaning of the pivot nominal (as in the analysis of Francez 2010),
- the contextual restriction is part of the meaning of the existential predicate *ann*, or
- the contextual restriction is syncategorematic, introduced as part of the compositional step by which *ann* is combined with the pivot nominal, but not part of the meaning of either element.

We have in fact already encountered observations which should help us to choose among these possibilities. We observed earlier that existential *ann* may be focused, as shown by the cleft examples in (49), repeated from (34):

(49) a. Ba   ann a bhí   an saol neamh-bhuartha an t-am sin.
          COP[PAST] in-it C be [PAST] the life untroubled   the time that
          'It really is true that there was an untroubled life at that time.'   RGB 71

      b. B'   ann a bhí   a' chuideachta   a' teacht   'na bhaile ón
          COP[PAST] in-it C be [PAST] the good-company come [PROG] home   from-the
          aonach,
          fair
          'There really was good company as we came home from the fair'   CAS 35

From the possibility of (49), it follows that *ann* must have semantic content and we must ask what that content might be. In our preliminary discussion of the interpretation of such examples, we spoke of an alternative set consisting of two propositions—for (49a), that an untroubled life was in existence at that time and that an untroubled life was not in existence at that time.

We are now in a position to be a little more precise about this intuition. If we assume that Irish *ann* expresses the same content often attributed to the implicit locative argument

assumed for other languages, then we begin to understand why examples like (34)/(49) are possible and why they mean what they do. That is, if existential *ann* introduces an anaphoric element which supplies the kind of contextual restriction in existential propositions argued for by Borchev and Partee, Musan, Bende-Farkas, Francez, and others, and if we follow in its particulars the account of Francez 2010, then *ann* will have a meaning, and it will have as at least part of its meaning the property of being an x which stands in the relation R to some contextually salient element a (often, but not always, a location in time or space). That is, it will subsume the content represented by (45).

A number of choices arise at this point. It could be that the meaning of *ann* simply IS (45). On this view, when the meaning of the small clause headed by *ann* is composed, the interpretation of *ann* (namely (45)) will compose with the generalized quantifier which is the denotation of its subject, and, as in the analysis of Francez 2010, the meaning of *ann* thereby comes to define the scope set for the subject quantifier. In the case of (47), for instance, this will yield the interpretation in (50):

(50) $\exists x$ [salt-shortage $(x) \wedge R(x, a)$]

A natural value for a in this context is the spatio-temporal region in which the conversation is taking place and a natural value for R is the binary relation of being in a spatio-temporal region. Interpreted as in (50), an utterance of (47) commits the speaker who used it to the claim that there is an eventuality of the salt-shortage kind which holds of the time and place defined by the conversation of which (47) was in fact a part.

This line of analysis lets us understand the context-dependence of existential claims in Irish within a reasonable framework of syntactic and semantic composition, but the real analytical payoff it yields is that it lets us begin to understand what cases like those in (34)/(49) might mean—cases in which the existential predicate appears in the focus position of a cleft. The ordinary semantic value of an example like (49a) will be that roughly represented in (51):

(51) $\exists x$ [untroubled-life $(x) \wedge R(x, a)$]

where, as always, R and a get their values from the discourse context. In this case, since (49a) is an expression of nostalgia for a past time and a former state of the world, the value of a is a particular time in the (imagined) past and R is the relation of temporal location. The focus semantic value will be a set of alternative propositions of the same form as (51), but with different values assigned to a (and perhaps to the relation R as well, though plausibility concerns will probably rein things in here). The ultimate effect will be that a use of (49a) will commit the speaker who uses it to a claim that at such and such a time-and-place, as opposed to other

imaginable times and places in an alternative-set (and notably the present time-and-place), life was untroubled.

This proposal goes a good distance towards letting us understand the context dependence of Irish existentials. It also begins to let us understand the particular force of clefts like (34)/(49).

But it is not yet enough. The interpretation just sketched (in which one context is compared with another) is indeed available for such clefted existentials. But more often, the alternative set conjured up by a use of (34)/(49) consists of just two propositions. In the case of (49b), for instance, those two propositions are (i) there was good company in that setting and (ii) that there was not good company in that setting. That is, an important aspect of the interpretation of (34)/(49) is that salient among the alternatives introduced by the focusing effect of the cleft are the alternatives of being 'in existence' or 'not being in existence' at some contextually given location, fixed for all of the alternatives. This is the sense in which *ann* really is an existential predicate, and it is this aspect of its meaning which is not yet captured by the proposal currently on the table. Put differently, this proposal does not yet provide an understanding of what is 'existential' about *ann*; it is unclear, for example, how in the context of this proposal one would make the crucial distinction between existential *ann* and the locative deictic *ann*.

It turns out, I think, that we can make progress on resolving this inadequacy by focusing on two additional questions whose relevance may not initially be obvious but which happen to be important in their own right:

- How is the sketchy syntax so far outlined to be embedded in a plausible larger theory of clausal syntax in Irish (and in general)?
- What is the status of the definiteness restriction in Irish?

Answering these two questions will involve us in what may well feel like a lengthy detour from our principal theme. But besides being important in their own right, the two questions turn out to be intimately related and mutually revealing. And they should also lead us back to a possible resolution of the impasse just reached.

We can begin with the second question.

5   The Definiteness Restriction

Consider again our schematic structure (19), repeated here as (52):

(52)   [tá   [DP   *ann*   ]]

If there were a definiteness effect in Irish of the familiar kind, then the DP-position of (52) should be unable to host strong quantifiers, and should be at least inhospitable to definites of various kinds. At first blush, there seems to be no such restriction. Definite descriptions in fact appear freely in the DP-position of (52), as shown for DP's headed by the definite determiner in (53), and for DP's whose definiteness is determined by a definite possessor in (54):

(53) a. Ní raibh   na purgóidí ann na laethanta úd   a tá   inniu
          NEG be [PAST] the drugs   in-it the days   those c be [PRES] today
          'There weren't the drugs in those days that there are today.'   MBS 157

      b. Dá mbeadh   an tÉirí Amach ann
          if be [COND] the rebellion   in-it
          'If there had been the rebellion'   GB 101

      c. Bhí   a fhios   acu   go mbeadh   an tsochraid ann.
          be [PAST] knowledge at-them c   be [COND] the funeral   in-it
          'They knew that there would be the funeral.'   STL 113

      d. nuair a bhí   an Drochshaol ann
          when c be [PAST] the Famine   in-it
          'When there was the Famine'   GOG 142

      e. ba   cheart an tAifreann a bheith ann
          would-be right   the mass   be [–FIN] in-it
          'There ought to be the mass.'   IM 63

(54) a. d'fhéad   clann   a chlainne a bheith anois ann
          can [PAST] children his children be [–FIN] now in-it
          'It could be that there are his children's children now.'   STL 7

      b. Bíonn   séasúr na móna ann go deireadh mí   Mheán Fómhair
          be [HABIT] season the turf   in-it till end   month September
          'There's (it's) the turf-season until the end of September.'   CF 82

      c. tá bagairt an Bhéarla ann i gcónaí.
          is threat   the English in-it always/still
          'There is always/still the threat from English.'   PNG 335

The examples in (53) and (54) involve small clause complements to the verb to be; those in (55) illustrate the same fact for existential small clauses in other syntactic settings.

(55) a. ó   tharla   an tráthnóna breá ann
          since happen [PAST] the afternoon fine in-it
          'since it happened that there was the nice afternoon'   TGC 96

      b. D'fhan   an regatta ann
          remain [PAST] the   in-it
          'The regatta remained (in existence).'   STL 141

  c.   agus an oíche ann
       and the night in-it
       'since there (it) was the night'   SSPG 16

There has been some controversy about the status of the corresponding examples in English existentials (Prince 1978, Abbot 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997, Prince 1992, Ward & Birner 1995, 1997). While cross-linguistic comparison of degrees of acceptability or deviance are extremely difficult, my sense is that the status of these structures in Irish is quite different from their status in English. There is a reason why in English such examples are often judged as ill-formed out of context (note the status of the translations in (54) and (55)). They are never so judged in Irish, as far as I know. We will be in a position, in section 7, to put this contention on a firmer basis; my conclusion for now, though, is that we have here a real contrast between Irish and English.

  Demonstrative descriptions are also well-formed in pivot position, as shown in (56).[14]

(56) a.   Bhí   fhios   ag a' diúlach go raibh   sí seo   ann
           be [PAST] knowledge at the guy   c be [PAST] she DEMON in-it
           'The guy knew that there was this person.'   SAB 238

      b.   go raibh   an chontabhairt sin ann
           c be [PAST] the danger   that in-it
           'that there was that danger'   SBNI 119

      c.   An   bhfuil an t-oileán sin   i gcónaí ann?
           INTERR is   the island   DEMON always in-it
           'Does that island still exist?'   CAB 132

      d.   na drocháiteacha. Tá   siad sin   ann.
           the bad-places   be [PRES] they DEMON in-it
           'the bad places. They (those ones) exist.   DGD 156

Proper names and pronouns occur freely, (57) illustrating both possibilities simultaneously:

(57) Táimse ann ó   roimh Ábraham a bheith ann
      I-am   in-it from before   be [-FIN] in-it
      'I have existed since before Abraham existed.'   NCS 251

(58) a.   Tá   sé ann thart fá chéad   bliain
           be [PRES] it in-it around hundred year
           'It has existed for about a hundred years.'   MSN 236

      b.   rinne an Chomhairle Chontae dearmad   go raibh   muid ann
           made the County Council   forgetfulness c be [PAST] we   in-it
           'The County Council forgot that we existed.'   MSN 236

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[14]The examples in (56) do not have the quasi-indefinite or presentational interpretation available to English demonstratives in examples such as *There was this guy I knew*.

c. Is   mór an trua nach bhfuil   siad anois ann.
    COP[PRES] great the pity NEG C be [PRES] they now   in-it
    'It's a great pity that they don't exist now.'   MSN 227

d. bhí   sé ann roimh mo linn
    be [PAST] he in-it before my time
    'He existed before my time.'   FCME 93

e. is   cosúil nach rabhadar   ann le tabhairt dúinn
    COP[PRES] like   NEG C they-were in-it to-give-to-us
    'It seems that there weren't them to give to us.'   GB 100

f. cheapadar   go mbeadh   sí go deo ann
    they-thought C be [COND]   it always in-it
    'They thought that there would always be it (the good weather).'   AII 124

The definiteness effect emerges with force, however, when one considers the strong quantifiers. Examples such as (59) are profoundly ungrammatical (or uninterpretable)[15]:

(59) a. *Tá   bunús na ndaoine ann nach mbeidh sásta   choíche.
          be [PRES] most the people in-it NEG C be [FUT] satisfied ever
          'There are most people who will never be satisfied.'

      b. *Tá   achan duine ann nach mbeidh sásta   choíche.
          be [PRES] every person in-it NEG C be [FUT] satisfied ever
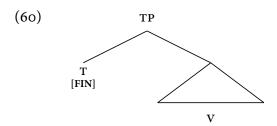   'There is everyone who will never be satisfied.'

Before we try to understand this pattern and its relation to manifestations of the definiteness effect in other languages, and in particular before we address the question of why the definites seem to pattern differently in Irish, we need to revisit our assumptions about how clauses are built in Irish. For it turns out that when we pay closer attention to the syntax of subject-hood in Irish, things become more complicated in an interesting and useful way.
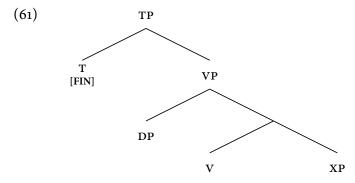

6   Clausal Architecture Redux

Consider once more the schematic structure in (3), repeated here as (60):

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[15]To be more precise—such examples are acceptable to the extent that they lend themselves to an interpretation involving a physical location, one involving the basic interpretation of *ann* as a deictic locative. When consultants are pushed to consider the existential interpretation, they typically report that it is impossible to work out what the examples ought to mean.

(60)

```
            TP
           /  \
          /    \
         T      /\
       [FIN]   /  \
              /    \
             /_____\
                V
```

One way of fleshing out the general framework of understanding schematized in (60) is to assume the relatively simple structure in (61):

(61)

```
              TP
            /    \
           /      \
          T        VP
        [FIN]     /  \
                 /    \
                DP     \
                      / \
                     /   \
                    V     XP
```

On this view, the functional head corresponding to inflectional material is unitary and selects the verbal projection; the subject does not raise, but rather surfaces in the same position in which it is thematically licensed. The verb however, in amalgamating with inflectional material, raises past the un-raised subject, giving VSO order.

Pleasing as this view is, it is known to be too simplistic. There is clear evidence that the subject in fact raises out of the verbal projection into the inflectional layer. That evidence is discussed in some detail in McCloskey 1996, 2001 and will not be rehearsed here. However, one relevant set of observations will be useful for the present discussion. There is a class of adverbs which can appear following the subject but preceding complements and VP-level adjuncts— *riamh* (ever), *go fóill* (still, yet), *fós* (still, yet), *choíche* (ever), *i gcónaí* (always), *go minic* (often). They correspond closely to the class identified as VP-external or VP-peripheral in much comparative work, and there is in addition strong evidence from within the language that they are VP-external (from the study of ellipsis and from the study of non-finite clauses, in which verbs do not front). The examples in (62) are typical.

(62)   a.   Ní   bhfuair aon bhean   riamh roimhe   greim láimhe   air.
              NEG took   any woman ever   before-it grip   hand [GEN] on-him
              'No woman had ever before taken his hand.'   CC 17

b.   Deireann siad i gcónaí paidir roimh am   luí.
say [PRES] they always   prayer before time lie [-FIN]
'They always say a prayer before bed-time.'

c.   ní   rachaidh trá   choíche ar mo mheas ort.
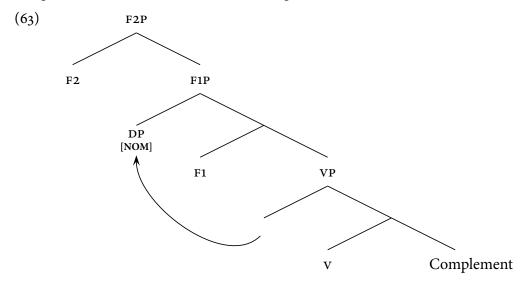NEG go [FUT] ebbing ever   on my respect on-you
'My respect for you will never wane.'   ODRII 255

d.   Bíonn   ceo go mion minic ar na hoileáin seo.
be [PRES-HABIT] mist very-often   on the islands   DEMON
'There's very often mist on these islands'   AII 125

In light of this, what is needed is something at least as elaborate as (63):

(63)

Given (63), there are two distinct projections in the inflectional layer between v and c, and the verb raises to a head-position above and to the left of the projection to which the most prominent case-less nominal in vp raises. It is an important question what these inflectional projections are (F2 and F1 of (63)), but it is not one that we need to resolve in order to make progress on our current questions.

7   The Definiteness Restriction Redux

The crucial observation is now that, given (63), or similar elaborations, it is impossible on the basis of simple inspection of the word order alone, to know for a structure like (64):

(64)   [_TP {T+V}   DP   XP   ]

whether DP occupies the higher or the lower of the two 'subject-positions' in (63). For existential structures, this question is of central importance, since a nominal 'trapped' within VP could very well support a different range of interpretations than one which has been raised out of VP and into the inflectional layer (see especially Diesing 1992 and a great deal of related and subsequent work). The VP-peripheral adverbials discussed at (62), however, provide us with a probe which will distinguish the two positions. Nominals which appear to the right of such adverbs must presumably be in the lower of the two positions of (63), while nominals to the left of them must have raised out of VP.

Now note that in existentials (and in certain closely related clause-types), the subject may follow a VP-edge adverb; examples with the general structure in (65) occur freely, as shown in (66):

(65)   [$_{TP}$ *be*   ADV   DP   *ann*   ]

(66)   a.   ní   raibh   riamh díospóireacht ann fá   na nithe seo
             NEG be [PAST] ever   debate   in-it about the things DEMON
             'there was never any debate about these things'   PNG 187

       b.   bhí   chomh maith mórchuid daoine ann
             be [PAST] also   many   people in-it
             'there were also many people'   FI 236

       c.   Bíonn   i gcónaí grúpaí beaga ann fosta,
             be [PRES-HABIT] always   groups small in-it also
             'There are always small groups also.'   BEO 9-1-02

       d.   Bíonn   i gcónaí daoine ann nach ndéanann a dhath.
             be [PRES-HABIT] always   people in-it NEG C do [PRES] nothing
             'There are always people who do nothing.'

       e.   Tá   anois cuid mhor daoine óga   ann a tá   tugtha   don   ól
             be [PRES] now   many   people young in-it C be [PRES] addicted to-the drink
             'There are now many young people who are addicted to drink.'

In all of the examples of (66), the nominal in the lower (post-adverbial) position is indefinite. This is no accident. In the context of (65), the definiteness effect re-emerges in full and familiar form.[16]:

(67)   a.   *Bhí   i gcónaí an Chéad Chogadh Domhanda ann
             be [PAST] still   the first   war   global   in-it
             'There was still the First World War.'

---

[16]The contrasts in (67)–(69) were confirmed by seven consultants. They are surprisingly clear and sharp.

     b. *Bhí   ariamh An Spiorad Naomh ann
        be [PAST] ever   the spirit   holy   in-it
        'There was always the Holy Spirit.'

(68) a. Bhí   an Inid   anois ann
        be [PAST] the Shrovetide now in-it
        'It was now Shrovetide.'

     b. *Bhí   anois an Inid   ann
        be [PAST] now the Shrovetide in-it
        'It was now Shrovetide.'

(69) a. Beidh   na Dílseoirí i gcónaí ann.
        be [FUT] the Loyalists always in-it
        'There will always be the Loyalists.'

     b. *Beidh   i gcónaí na Dílseoirí ann.
        be [FUT] always   the Loyalists in-it
        'There will always be the Loyalists.'

It should be noted that there is no requirement that indefinites remain in the lower position, since we also have examples like (70), in which an indefinite pivot appears to the left of adverbs which demarcate the left edge of VP.

(70) a. Ní bhíodh   aon nursanna an uair sin   ann.
        NEG be [PAST-HABIT] any nurses   the time DEMON in-it
        'There were no nurses in those days.'   GBR 152

     b. Ní raibh   aon chóracha taistil   an uair sin   ann
        NEG be [PAST] any provisions travel [GEN] the time DEMON in-it
        'There was no public transport in those days.'   AL 19

     c. Dúirt   sé go raibh   feirmeoir uair ann
        say [PAST] he c be [PAST] farmer   time in-it
        'He said that there was once a farmer.'   GBR 144

The correct generalization, then, is that only indefinites have the option of remaining in the lower of the two positions of (63).

    Further evidence for the existence of these two positions and for the special role that the lower position plays in existential structures, can be gleaned from the examples in (71), whose relevance for the present context was first brought to my attention by Cathal Doherty. In these examples, it seems that both the lower and higher positions are simultaneously occupied:

(71) a. Tá   muid anois seisear   ann.
        be [PRES] we   now six-people in-it
        'Now we are six./There are six of us now.'

b. … go raibh siad 20,000 fear ann
 c be [PAST] they [NOM] man in-it
 'that there were 20,000 of them/that they were 20,000 strong' ERON 194

c. Bhí siad scaifte mór ann.
 be [PAST] they [NOM] crowd big in-it
 'There was a big crowd of them.'

d. bhí siad triúr deartháir ann
 be [PAST] they [NOM] three brothers in-it
 'There were three brothers of them.' IDG 82

In such cases (which are felt by many contemporary speakers to be formal, if not archaic), there is a definite description in the immediate post-verbal position and an 'additional' cardinality expression to the right of the definite description, but to the left of the existential predicate. I cannot claim to understand the syntax of (71) (it is unclear to me in particular whether or not the higher and lower 'subject' positions are related by movement), but I suspect that the phenomenon represents a species of Quantifier Float however that phenomenon is ultimately to be understood. Partial understanding is possible, however, and if the definite and the cardinality expressions of (71) occupy the higher and the lower subject positions respectively of (63), then the contrast exemplified in (72), which is stark, falls into place:

(72) a. Bíonn siad i gcónaí scaifte mór ann.
 be [PRES-HABIT] they [NOM] always crowd big in-it
 'There's always a big crowd of them.'

b. *Bíonn i gcónaí siad scaifte mór ann.
 be [PRES-HABIT] always they [NOM] crowd big in-it
 'There's always a big crowd of them.'

We should note in passing that the observations made in (67)–(69) provide confirmation for a decision made earlier about how the definiteness effect presents itself in Irish. In discussing the status of definite descriptions in the subject position of Irish existentials (see (53)–(55) above) we claimed that they were fully acceptable, by contrast with their English counterparts:

(73) nuair a bhí an Drochshaol ann
 when c be [PAST] the Famine in-it
 'When there was the Famine' GOG 142

This decision was made despite the fact that there has been controversy among researchers about the status of English examples like the translation of (73). But we have just seen that the contrast in acceptability between the b-examples and the a-examples of (67)–(69) is strongly felt, a fact which falls into place naturally if the b-examples are unacceptable to the same extent

and for the same reasons as the corresponding English examples, while the a-examples are in fact fully well-formed (an interpretation confirmed by consultants).

Returning to the central theme, however, the principal conclusion here is the following. Although Irish seems at first to present a language-particular variant of the definiteness effect, it turns out that this is an illusion born of insufficiently careful syntactic analysis. Closer examination reveals that the range of nominals which may appropriately occur in the lower of the two subject positions of Irish existentials is exactly the same as those which may occur in the post-verbal (and lower) position in English existentials. Put differently: when we compare analogous syntactic positions in the two languages, we find analogous restrictions on the kinds of nominals which may occupy those positions. There is an important sense, in other words, in which the definiteness effect in Irish is just like the definiteness effect of English.

But there remains an important difference between the two languages. While the acceptability of definites as pivots depends on their syntactic position, strong quantifiers are categorically excluded as subjects of existentials, whether they occupy the higher or the lower of the two positions of (63). Examples such as (74), repeated from (59), are impossible:

(74)   a.   *Tá   bunús na ndaoine ann nach mbeidh sásta   choíche.
               be [PRES] most   the people   in-it NEG C be [FUT] satisfied ever
               'There are most people who will never be satisfied.'

        b.   *Tá   achan duine ann nach mbeidh sásta   choíche.
               be [PRES] every person in-it NEG C be [FUT] satisfied ever
               'There is everyone who will never be satisfied.'

Since such examples are impossible in an absolute sense, they must be impossible under all possible parses. And indeed no word-order manipulation can rescue (74):

(75)   a.   *Tá   bunús na ndaoine i gconaí ann nach mbeidh sásta   choíche.
               be [PRES] most   the people   always in-it NEG C be [FUT] satisfied ever
               'There are always most people who will never be satisfied.'

        b.   *Tá   achan duine i gcónaí ann nach mbeidh sásta   choíche.
               be [PRES] every person always   in-it NEG C be [FUT] satisfied ever
               'There is always everyone who will never be satisfied.'

(76)   a.   *Tá   i gcónaí bunús na ndaoine ann nach mbeidh sásta   choíche.
               be [PRES] always   most   the people   in-it NEG C be [FUT] satisfied ever
               'There are always most people who will never be satisfied.'

        b.   *Tá   i gcónaí achan duine ann nach mbeidh sásta   choíche.
               be [PRES] always   every person in-it NEG C be [FUT] satisfied ever
               'There is always everyone who will never be satisfied.'

There is a contrast here with English to the extent that the examples in (75) correspond, when viewed from a certain perspective, to (77b), which is fully acceptable and fully interpretable.

(77)   a.   *There is everyone in the room who needs to be here.

        b.   Everyone is in the room who needs to be here.

In the Irish examples of (75), and in (77b) in English, the strong quantifier has raised to the higher subject position (plausibly the specifier position of Tense in both languages). This raising 'solves the interpretability problem' for English, so to speak, but does not for Irish. Now one's intuitions are surely screaming at this point that (77b) is not an existential and that there is therefore no reason to think that the definiteness effect would be at play. While that intuition is surely correct, the challenge is to say what it means to be, or not to be, an 'existential'. In its turn, the answer to that question is in a certain sense obvious. Irish and English are surely different because of the necessary presence of existential *ann* in Irish and the absence of such an element in English. That intuition is confirmed by the routine observation that (78) (without *ann*) is well-formed:

(78)   Tá achan duine   i láthair.
        is every person present
        'Everyone is present.'

or indeed by the observation that the examples of (74) are in fact acceptable and interpretable when *ann* is not existential but is rather the deictic locative anaphor. In all of the cases that succeed, what is absent is a forced interaction between a strong quantifier and the existential predicate *ann*.

How, though, should we cash these intuitions out formally? The section that follows builds an analysis of the various threads of observation laid out so far, with the goal of being clearer about what it might mean to call *ann* a 'distinctively existential element'.

8   Composing the Existential Proposition

In understanding existential structures in Irish and how they are composed, the principal challenge is to understand the syntax and semantics of the existential predicate *ann*. As we saw in section 3, there is abundant evidence that *ann* is a predicate and also that it is a semantically contentful stage-level predicate. We have also seen (in section 4) that there is evidence that the existential predicate is the locus of the particular kind of context-dependence documented by Francez as being characteristic of existential propositions generally, a conclusion which is

entirely in harmony with the stage-level status of *ann*. In the same discussion, however, we also found reason to suspect that this was not the whole story—that *ann* is semantically richer than this analysis would suggest. Section 7 provided a new way of reasoning about what that additional content must be. For what was established there was that the definiteness effect in Irish is not unitary, but consists rather of two distinct restrictions:

○ There is an absolute ban on strong quantifiers in existential structures, one which holds whether the pivot nominal occupies the higher or the lower subject position (call this DE-STRONG).

○ There is a distinction between definite and indefinite descriptions, which is sensitive to the syntactic prominence of the pivot: low DP's, and only low DP's, are required to be indefinite. Call this DE-WEAK. Importantly, definite descriptions, unlike strong quantifiers, can be the subject of *ann*, as long as they occupy the higher of the two available subject positions.

There is, as we have seen, abundant evidence that DE-STRONG reflects some compositional in-compatibility between existential *ann* and the strong quantifiers. It follows, then, that whatever interpretation is assigned to *ann* should guarantee that incompatibility.

There is in fact an existing analysis of existential propositions in which the split between DE-STRONG and DE-WEAK emerges as particularly natural—the analysis developed by Louise McNally (1992; 1998; 2011), which builds in turn on work by Michael Lumsden (1988).[17] This analysis shares with other approaches the idea that the pivot nominal of an existential is property-denoting rather than quantificational (Milsark 1974, Van Geenhoven 1998, Chung & Ladusaw 2004, Sabbagh 2009), but it is distinctive in two related ways. The first is that it is one of the few proposals about existential semantics in which a principled connection is made between the truth-conditional content of existential propositions and the definiteness effect. The second is that it builds in, in a particularly deep way, the contrast that we have just exposed in the Irish data between strong quantifiers on the one hand and definite expressions on the other. McNally's proposal is that the definiteness effect is not unitary but rather has two distinct sources. Quantified nominals are excluded from the pivot position of existentials on seman-tic grounds—in essence because when they are deployed in existential contexts an irreparable compositional incompatibility results. Definite descriptions, proper names and pronouns, on

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[17] See also Zucchi 1995, Musan 1996, Ward & Birner 1995 and for closely related proposals Milsark 1974, Land-man 2004.

the other hand, are excluded from the pivot position (weakly) on pragmatic grounds, and the acceptability of the structures of which they are a part is as a consequence sensitive to aspects of the discourse context in a way that the first effect is not.

The core of the proposal is the postulation of an intransitive predicate—that of being *instantiated* (at a particular index). This is the main predicate in an existential proposition and it takes the property denoted by the pivot as its sole argument. The proposition so formed is true if and only if the property denoted by the pivot is instantiated by some individual at the index of evaluation. The analysis can be implemented in two ways. One can assume that the property plays its role in the composition directly (the predicate INSTANTIATE takes a property as its argument). McNally's actual proposal, though (in most presentations of the analysis) is more elaborate. Pivots are taken not to denote properties, but rather the entity correlate of a property, in the sense of Chierchia 1984 and Chierchia & Turner 1988. Being of the type of entities, they are reifications of the properties of which they are correlates and they can serve as arguments of predicates of the most basic type (the type *<e,t>*). On this view, then, the predicate INSTANTIATE is of type *<e,t>* but it is subject to a sortal restriction that it combines only with the sort of individuals that are the correlates of properties. On this version of the analysis, an existential such as (79a) with the logical form in (79b) will be true (at a given index) if the property of being a queue is instantiated by some entity.

(79)   a.   There's a queue.

    b.   INSTANTIATE($^{\cap}\lambda x$ [**queue** (x)])

Distinguishing between the two variants of the core proposal is a subtle matter and it will not much matter for our purposes here how it is ultimately resolved. However, in light of the arguments developed in McNally 2009, I will work here with the slightly more elaborate analysis stated in terms of entity correlates of properties.

However implemented, the proposal yields an intuitively satisfying semantics for existential propositions, and it also gives rise to some expectations about how the definiteness effect should work. Since the predicate INSTANTIATE of (79) selects entity correlates of properties, any DP which can plausibly be so interpreted will be expected to yield a well-formed interpretation when deployed in the pivot position. If weak DP's[18] are correctly viewed as property-

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[18]Since the terms were first introduced by Milsark, there has been some variation in how the terms 'strong' and 'weak' are used. Our usage here is different from at least some common uses in the literature. For Barwise & Cooper (1981), for example, proper names and definite descriptions count as 'strong' quantifiers. For our purposes here, though, it is crucial that proper names and definite descriptions can be at least coerced into being property-denoting.

denoting, then it is expected that they would appear naturally in pivot position. On the other hand, those quantificational DP's which cannot be interpreted as property-denoting (or type-shifted in such a way that they can be so interpreted) will be rigidly excluded from the pivot position. This is why necessarily quantificational expressions such as universal and proportional quantifiers are definitively excluded from pivot position in existentials.[19] Definites, demonstratives, pronouns and proper names, on the other hand, are expected to behave differently. Since they can be type-shifted to a property-type (Partee 1987), we expect them to have well-formed interpretations in existential contexts. The infelicitousness of such expressions in existential contexts must then reflect the operation of some different, and presumably pragmatic, mechanism.[20]

The two-part definiteness effect that we see so clearly in the Irish facts provides strong support for the basic thrust of McNally's proposals. Those proposals, in turn, provide us with a way of understanding DE-STRONG, by guaranteeing the needed incompatibility between *ann* and true quantifiers (universal and proportional). The basic idea is that the predicate INSTANTIATE of McNally's analysis is a central component of the semantic content of existential *ann*. We can implement this idea, while preserving our conclusion from section 4 that *ann* is also the locus of context-dependence, by assigning the interpretation in (80) to *ann* in its existential use[21]:

(80) λP [INSTANTIATE($^{\cap}\lambda x \ (P(x) \wedge R \ (x, a)))$]

This interpretation combines two central elements—McNally's fundamental semantics for existentials with Francez' theory of the context-dependence of existential propositions. (80) en-

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[19] If the analysis is implemented directly in terms of properties, the exclusion will be on the basis of a type-clash. On the approach of (79b), stated in terms of entity-level correlates of properties, the relevant examples will violate a sortal restriction on the instantiation predicate. I will use the term 'compositional incompatibility' to cover both alternatives.

[20] See McNally 1992, 1998, 2009 for the details. See Francez 2007: 31–35 and Francez 2009 for a critique and McNally 2011 for a partial response. One of the issues at play is that McNally's analysis requires that all non-monotone-increasing quantifiers be decomposed. A weak pivot such as *no man*, for example, must be analyzed as involving a high sentential negation which has an indefinite (providing the property denotation) in its scope. The plausibility of McNally's analysis depends then in part on the general plausibility of such decompositions. For relevant discussion see Ladusaw 1992, Potts 2002 among many others.

[21] A reviewer worries that there may be an incompatibility between the proposal in (80) and our earlier, and somewhat tentative, conclusion that existential *ann* is a stage-level predicate, since 'instantiate' is surely a property which holds of a kind rather than an instance of a kind and of an individual rather than of a stage of an individual. What renders the existential predicate at least stage-like, I believe, is the requirement of spatio-temporal grounding provided by the second term in (80). This conclusion may require us to re-think some of the already obscure material of Section 3 above and to re-think whether the distinctions explored there are properly characterized as distinctions between types of predicates; see Adger & Ramchand 2003 for relevant discussion.

codes a second-order property—the property a property has when it is instantiated by some individual x located at a contextually defined (and perhaps metaphorical) spatio-temporal location a. When existential *ann* is used as the predicate of a small clause, the interpretation in (80) will combine with the interpretation of the small clause subject resulting in a proposition whose content is either that the property denoted by the subject is instantiated in a particular context or it is not. Consider a case like (81), for example:

(81)   Tá fíon ann.
        is wine in-it
        'There's wine.'

Here the crucial substructure is the small clause consisting of the subject nominal *fíon* and the predicate *ann*. Functional application[22] will yield (82) as the interpretation of this small clause:

(82)   [INSTANTIATE($^{\cap}\lambda x \ (wine(x) \land R \ (x, a))$)]

(82) denotes the proposition that (at a given index) the property of being an instance of the kind wine is instantiated by some entity x at a contextually salient spatio-temporal location a—say the present home of the interlocutors for a given use of (81).

Consider the merits of this proposal.

One of the things that we have been seeking throughout this paper is some way of making sense of the intuitive notion 'existential predicate'. What we have in (80) is such a proposal, one that says that the crucial property is that of being instantiated (in McNally's sense) at some contextually defined perspectival center. This does not seem like an unreasonable view of what it might mean to be an existential predicate.

It also follows, of course, that DE-STRONG should hold, just as on McNally's analysis. Any structure which forces us to compose the meaning in (80) with the meaning of a proportional or universal quantifier will give rise to an irreconcilable type-clash. Or it will at least for any quantification over individual-level variables. If the relevant quantifiers in subject position were to quantify over entity correlates of properties rather than over individuals, then they should behave like any other quantified argument. In McNally's account, this observation forms the basis for understanding Lumsden's (1988) observation that examples like (83) are interpretable and often felicitous:

(83)   There was every kind of fruit on the table.

In such cases, *every* is held to quantify over entity correlates of properties and the type-clash

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[22] Assuming here that the predicate is the functor and that the subject is its sole argument.

that leads to DE-STRONG does not arise. It is therefore reassuring that similar effects hold in Irish, as seen in (84):

(84)   Bhí achan sort bidh   agus achan sort dí   ann.
        was every kind food[GEN] and every sort drink[GEN] in-it
        'There was every kind of food and every kind of drink.'

All in all, then, the proposal in (80) undergirds what seems to be a successful theory of that aspect of the definiteness effect that we have called here DE-STRONG. For the second aspect of the restriction—what we have called here DE-WEAK—we are pretty much where we were before consideration of the Irish facts. What needs to be understood is why indefinites favor lower, VP-internal positions while definites favor higher, VP-external positions. There are a number of proposals on the market which aim to account for this pattern,[23] and I have little to add here to those debates, save to point to one area of progress: the Irish pattern is now revealed (see section 7) to conform closely to the more general and expected pattern and to be less idiosyncratic than it seemed at first to be.

A crucial component of this set of proposals is syntactic, in the following sense: the semantic content needed for constructing existential propositions is in Irish lexicalized in the predicative expression *ann*. This expression is in turn an obligatory sub-part of the larger structures in which it appears (see section 3 above); that is, it is impossible to build a small clause without a predicate and a subject. In English there is no such predicate and the relevant semantic content is lexicalized differently. Presumably the content expressed by *ann* in Irish is lexicalized in English within a verb—in existential *be* or, more likely, in one of the functional heads in *v*P that are gathered up to be realized morphologically as *be* (see Deal 2009, especially section 5). The fact, then, that (75) in English (repeated here as (85)) is available reflects the availability of a non-existential use of *be* (one that involves no use of the predicate INSTANTIATE central to McNally's analysis):

(85)   Everyone is in the room who needs to be here.

For Irish (75), on the other hand, there is no escape from the compositional dilemma created by the obligatory presence of the existential predicate *ann*.[24]

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[23]See McNally 2011 for an overview. Pragmatic approaches include Prince 1992, Ward & Birner 1995, Abbot 1992, 1993 and a group of proposals which exploit the non-canonical status of the 'subject' of existentials—see especially Mikkelsen 2002, Beaver et al. 2006, Borschev & Partee 2001, and Partee & Borschev 2007.

[24]On this view there is presumably an ungrammatical version of English (85), based on 'existential *be*,' whose ungrammaticality is however masked by the availability of an alternative path (non-existential) to the surface form in (85). A challenge for everyone is to better understand what, if anything, is the common property which unifies the various different uses of *be* so that they have a common morphological realization. See also note 7.

Just as important as the account that it yields of the definiteness effect, however, is the fact that the proposal in (80) provides an answer to a different question, one which has haunted us almost from the beginning of the present paper. This is the question of what it could mean to focus the existential predicate *ann*, as happens in the cleft examples of (34)/(49). One of the relevant examples is presented again in (86):

(86) B'   ann a bhí   a' chuideachta   a' teacht   'na bhaile ón
      COP[PAST] in-it c be [PAST] the good-company come [PROG] home   from-the
      aonach,
      fair
      'There really was good company as we came home from the fair'   CAS 35

If we make use of a standard set of proposals for the semantics of focus (the 'alternative semantics' for focus), going back to the seminal work of Mats Rooth (see Rooth 1985, 1992, von Stechow 1991), then the semantic reflex of focus is a second semantic value, one which for a clause consists of a set of propositions. This second-tier semantic value renders salient a set of claims which might have been made but which were not, thus providing an understanding of the sense in which focus, of this type at least, is fundamentally contrastive. For specificity, let us adopt the framework of Rooth 1992, and consider how the meaning of an example like (86) will be composed. The focus semantic value for (86) will be computed by substituting for the focused predicate *ann* a free variable of the same type as its ordinary semantic value (which is (80) on the account we are now exploring). Various plausible values can be assigned to that variable depending on the context of use. Given (80) a reasonable alternative value to consider would surely be (87):

(87) $\lambda P \ [\ \neg \text{INSTANTIATE}(^\cap \lambda x \ (P(x) \land R \ (x, a))) \ ]$

This (when composed with the ordinary semantic value of the subject nominal) will yield the interpretation we have been seeking—one on which the salient alternative is the negation of the proposition expressed in the ordinary semantic value of (86). Thus, the alternative set conjured up by a use of (86) consists of two propositions: (i) there was good company in that setting and (ii) that there was not good company in that setting. In this interpretation, the context is fixed and the polarity of the proposition expressed shifts among alternatives.

But it will also be possible to shift the value assigned to the individual *a* (the spatio-temporal anchor for the existence claim) in constructing alternatives; this option will lead to interpretations on which the pragmatically relevant contrast involves different spatio-temporal contexts in which the existential claim is asserted to hold (in which the property expressed by the pivot

is instantiated). We thus arrive at the kind of understanding of these crucial examples that we identified in section 4 as being needed.[25]

In sum, the proposal developed here seems to provide an understanding of the local and context dependent character of existential claims (essentially as in the work of Francez). It also provides an understanding of how the definiteness effect manifests itself in Irish, and of the ways in which the definiteness effect in Irish resembles that found in other languages and also of the ways in which it is distinctive. It does that without appealing to arbitrarily different language-particular variants of the definiteness effect. It also provides a semantics for the existential predicate *ann* which seems reasonable at an intuitive level and which allows an understanding of why it can be focused (see (34)/(49)). In addition, it provides some understanding of what such examples may convey. Finally, the whole account is embedded in a framework for syntactic and semantic composition which involves few or no exotic mechanisms.

9   THE LARGER CONTEXT

This paper opened by announcing two goals—(i) to contribute to the comparative typology of existential structures by providing a reasonably detailed study of their manifestation in one language and (ii) to use that starting point to address some of the more general issues raised by the study of existentials. In this brief final section I would like to focus more explicitly on those larger issues.

As far as I know, the kind of dedicated non-verbal existential predicate that has been the focus of attention here has not been identified or discussed before. The existence of this type is of some interest in its own right, but focusing on it has an additional useful consequence. Since the syntax that is determined by this predicate is quite different from the syntax of existentials

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[25]The text discussion assumes that the existential expression *ann* is atomic. This assumption may be incorrect, though. Such inflected prepositions (recall that *ann* is the 3rd person singular non-feminine form of the preposition meaning *in*) more usually reflect a syntax in which a preposition projects a maximal phrase and selects a null pronominal as its complement. If the analysis of existential *ann* is not different from these more routine cases (a conclusion which may well be suggested by the coining of the Hiberno-English equivalent *in it*) and it therefore has a complex internal structure, then other analytical possibilities suggest themselves. For instance, it may be that it is the preposition *in* which introduces the predicate INSTANTIATE and that it is the silent pronominal which introduces the spatio-temporal anchor. On this view, (80) would not be the lexical meaning of an atomic element *ann* but would rather be composed from the interpretations of its sub-parts. On this view, one would have to consider the possibility of separate focus features on the two core sub-constituents—on the preposition and on the null pronominal. This could provide an alternative way of understanding the two readings associated with the cleft examples.

in other languages, we have the opportunity of running the natural experiment anticipated in the introduction. That is, we can ask how many of the familiar properties of existential structures remain constant in this very different syntactic environment, and what kinds of differences emerge as the syntax, so to speak, shifts. This mode of reasoning proved useful especially in the support that it uncovered for the kind of bifurcated view of the definiteness effect argued for by McNally (see sections 7 and 8).

At this point a typological question naturally arises: are there are other languages that make use of an element like Irish *ann*? That issue is beyond the scope of the present paper, but Rita Manzini suggests (personal communication) that the locative clitics found in existentials in many Romance languages (French *y*, Italian *ci*, Catalan *hi* and so on) could be viewed in such terms:

(88)   Il y a   des   problèmes.
         it Y has INDEF-PL problems
         'There are problems.'   FRENCH

(89)   Ci sono   due flori.
         CI be.PRES-P3 two flowers
         'There are two flowers.'   ITALIAN

(90)   Hi havia la   Joana a la   festa.
         HI was   the Joan at the party
         'There was Joan at the party.'   CATALAN

It is interesting in this context that, according to McNally (1998: 367), Catalan behaves as Irish seems initially to behave with respect to the definiteness effect (see section 5 above): definites appear naturally in the post-verbal pivot position, while necessarily quantificational nominals are categorically excluded. In the present context that might suggest that Catalan *hi* has something like the semantics suggested here for Irish *ann*, forcing the compositional incompatibility with universal and proportional quantifiers.

Another interesting candidate might be the *da*-existentials of German, studied recently by Jutta Hartmann (2008: Chap. 4):

(91)   Da ist eine ganze Generation, die   arbeiten will.
         DA is a   whole generation   who work   want
         'There is an entire generation that wants to work.'

Hartmann presents evidence that *da* is not an expletive element, but is rather an anaphoric expression referring to the 'here and now' of the speaker. In construction with the verb *sein* it expresses existential propositions, a use in which it is incompatible with strong quantifiers in

the pivot position, but compatible with definites (Hartmann 2008: 206–9).

Whatever the fate of such speculations, it will be interesting to see if other plausible instances of non-verbal existential predicates are identified as investigation proceeds. And it will be particularly interesting to investigate what the interaction is with definiteness effects in those languages which deploy such predicates.

Is there a general theory of existentials across languages, a common form behind the diversity so far discovered? Much current discussion assumes, either explicitly or implicitly, that there is a common syntax (and often a common compositional semantics) for existentials across languages. The presupposition of a common form often emerges in discussions of whether the 'NP-analysis' (in which an existential verb selects a single nominal complement) or the 'small clause analysis' (in which an existential verb selects a bare predicational nexus) is generally correct. But as more subtle analyses of a broader range of languages have been constructed, it seems increasingly unlikely that there is such a common form for existentials across languages. The NP-analysis seems more or less unassailable for languages such as Chamorro (Chung 1987), Maori (Chung & Ladusaw 2004), or Tagalog (Sabbagh 2009). But the evidence for a small clause analysis seems equally persuasive for Irish (see especially section 3 above). And in English, both possibilities are surely called for. There is no plausible way of analyzing (92a) in terms other than the NP-analysis; but equally, there is no good way of analyzing (92b) in terms other than (something like) the small clause analysis (Keenan 1987, Rezac 2006).

(92)   a.   There's no tea.
        b.   There were tabs being kept on these people.

What seems to be common across languages, rather, are the semantic primitives out of which existential propositions can be constructed. These primitives can be assembled into lexical items in different ways in different languages, initial choices which then drive the compositional engine in routine and very general ways (see Sabbagh 2009 for similar conclusions). Those semantic primitives have in turn presumably a deeper conceptual grounding (in the centrality of notions of location in human cognition, for instance), in ways that have come to the fore especially in the cross-linguistic study of predicates expressing psychological states (Jackendoff 1990: 300, note 4, Landau 2010).

There are no existential constructions here, of the kind considered in Lakoff 1987 or Johnson 2001. More generally, this is the kind of landscape which we would expect to find ourselves in if the principal locus of variation among languages was in the content of functional vocabulary items, in interaction with very general principles of syntactic and semantic composition.

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Appendix: Sources of Attested Examples

AFAP, *An Fear a Phléasc*, Mícheál Ó Conghaile

AGMTS, *Ar Gach Maoilinn Tá Síocháin*, Pádraig Ó Cíobháin

AII, *Allagar II*, Tomás Ó Criomhthain, ed. Pádraig Ua Maoileoin

AL, *Abair Leat*, Joe Daly, ed. Pádraig Tyers

BEO, *Beo*, Online current affairs journal, `http://www.beo.ie`

BG, *Báthadh an Ghrosvenor*, W. C. Russell, translated by Seosamh Mac Grianna

BOM, *Bloghanna Ón mBlascaod*, Tomás Ó Criomhthain

CAB, *Carraig an Bháis*, Colm Ó Ceallaigh

CAS, *Ceoltaí agus Seanchas le Seaghán Bán Mac Grianna*, ed. Ióseph Ó Searcaigh

CC, *Cruithneacht agus Ceannabháin*, Tomás Bairéad

CF, *Cois Fharraige Le Mo Linnse*, Seán Ó Conghaile

DGD, *Deoir Ghoirt an Deoraí*, Colm Ó Ceallaigh

DII, *Desiderius a Dó*, Pádraig Ó Cíobháin

DO, *Dialann Oilithrigh*, Donchadh Ó Céileachair

EB, *Eadarbhaile*, Seosamh Mac Grianna translator

ERON, *Eoghan Rua Ó Néill*, Seosamh Mac Grianna

FCME, *Fánaíocht i gContae Mhaigh Eo*, Séamas Mag Uidhir

FI, *Fan Inti*, Domhnall Mac Síthigh

FNDG, *An Fear Nach nDéanann Gáire*, Micheál Ó Conghaile

GB, *Gan Baisteadh*, Tomás Bairéad

GBR, *Gort Broc*, ed. Pádraig Ó Murchú

GLL, *An Gealas i Lár na Léithe*, Pádraig Ó Cíobháin

GOG, *Glórtha ón Ghorta: Béaloideas na Gaeilge agus an Gorta Mór*, ed. Cathal Póirtéir

IA, *Iomramh Aonair*, Liam Mac Con Iomaire

IDG, *Idir an Dá Ghaoth*, Pádraig Ua Cnáimhsí

IM, *Inis Meáin, Seanchas agus Scéalta*, Peadar Ó Concheanainn

LNT, *An Leacht Nár Tógadh*, Séamas Ó Conghaile

MBS, *Mura mBuafam—Suathfam*, Maidhc Dáinín Ó Sé

MSN, *Mící Sheáin Néill: Scéalaí agus Scéalta*, ed. Cathal Póirtéir

NCS, *Na Ceithre Soisgéil*, An tAthair Peadar Ua Laoghaire

ODRII, *Ó Donnbháin Rossa, Cuid a Dó*, Seán Ó Lúing

PF, *Paróiste an Fheirtéaraigh*, Tomás Mac Síthigh

PNG, *Pobal na Gaeltachta*, ed. Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, Liam Lillis Ó Laoire, Seán Ua Súillebháin

RGB, *Na Rosa go Bráthach*, Fionn Mac Cumhaill

RNG, *Raidio na Gaeltachta*, Irish Language Radio

SAB, *Seanchas Annie Bhán*, ed. Gordon W. MacLennan

SBNI, *Sgéalaidheacht as an mBíobla Naomhtha, Cuid a h-Aon*, An tAthair Peadar Ua Laoghaire

SGC, *Scríbhneoireacht na gConallach*, ed. Nollaig Mac Congáil,

SOCA, ''Scéaltaí ó Chúl Ao,'' Gearóid Ó Murchú, ed. Conn R. Ó Cléirigh, *Éigse xxx*

SOOT, *Seanchas ón Oileán Tiar*, Tomas Ó Criomhthain

SR, *Sciúird chun na Rúise*, Pádraig Ó Fiannachta

SSPG, *Scéalta agus Seanchas Phádraig Uí Ghrífín*, ed. Áine Mháire Ní Fhaoláin

STL, *Seanchas Thomáis Laighléis*, ed. Tomás de Bhaldraithe

TD, *Toraigh na dTonn*, Eoghan Ó Colm

TGC, *Thiar i nGleann Ceo*, Tadhg Ó Rabhartaigh