# Irish Nominal Syntax 1: Demonstratives   Jim McCloskey

Simple Cases

As we would expect for a strict VSO language, Irish shows noun-initial order, under most circumstances, in its nominal phrases. Some basic types are illustrated in (1) and (2). As we can see, all adjectives[1] follow the head noun. There is no (pronounced) indefinite article ((1a), (2a)), and the definite article is initial ((1b), (2b)):

(1)a fear mór téagartha groí
     man big stocky   cheerful
     'a big stocky cheerful man'

   b an fear mór téagartha groí
     the man big stocky   cheerful
     'the big stocky cheerful man'

(2)a suim   mhór sa   cheol
     interest great in-the music
     'great interest in music'

   b an dúil chraosachach san   airgead
     the liking voracious   in-the money
     'the voracious liking for money'

As we can also see from (2), postnominal adjectives appear (obligatorily) between the head noun and its subcategorized complements. A by-now familiar way of treating facts such as these, deriving from Cinque (1993), is to assume a structure like (3), with N raising around the adjectives to a functional head position in the space between D and N:

(3)
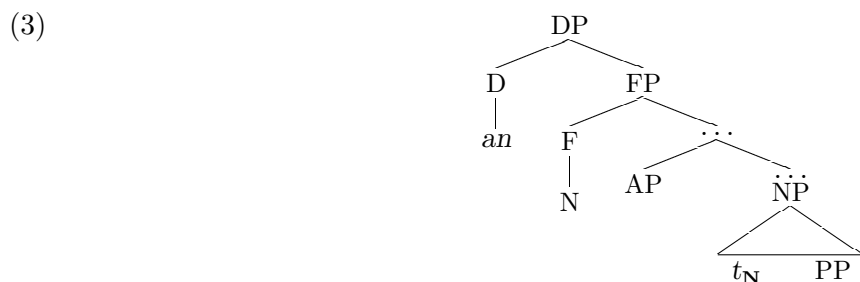
We can take this as our starting-point and go on to consider more troublesome and more complex phenomena. Of these, I want to consider here the syntax of demonstratives. The syntax of possessors and possessor agreement will be considered in Part Two.

Demonstratives

The basic cases are illustrated in (4):

(4)a *fear mór téagartha groí   seo
     man big stocky   cheerful DEM
     'this big stocky cheerful man'

   b an fear mór téagartha groí   seo
     the man big stocky   cheerful DEM
     'this big stocky cheerful man'

What we see here is that the final element of the nominal phrase is one of the demonstrative particles:

seo, sin, siúd, úd, udaí

---

[1] Except for a few which form compounds with the noun they modify—*sean-* 'old', *dea-*, 'nice, good' and so on.

which make a three-way distinction between proximate (*seo*), most distal (*siúd*, *úd*, or *udaí*), and intermediate (*sin*):

(5)   *an bhean seo*, *an bhean sin*, *an bhean siúd*, *an bhean udaí*

‘this woman’, ‘that woman’, ‘yon woman’, ‘yonder woman’

As illustrated in (4), the demonstrative particles must co-occur with the (initial) definite determiner, giving rise to the common view that these elements are discontinuous determiners: *an … seo*; *an … sin*; *an … siúd*; *an … udaí* A closer look at the evidence, however, suggests that this view is mistaken.

Bare Demonstratives

Observe firstly that the demonstrative particles commonly occur alone in the kinds of uses seen in (6):

(6)a Tabhair   domh sin.   b Tá   seo ag goillstean   orm.
     give [IMPV] *to-me* DEM   *be* [PRES] DEM *bother* [PROG] *on-me*
     ‘Give me that.’   ‘This is bothering me.’

 This use is subject to a restriction similar to that found in English, namely that the referent must be inanimate.

Demonstratives with Pronouns

Demonstratives may also co-occur with the whole range of personal pronouns, yielding structures such as (7):

(7)a Chuaigh sé seo   ar seachrán   b B’fhearr liom é   seo   fanacht   sa bhaile.
     go PAST *he* DEM *astray*   *I’d prefer*   *him* DEM *stay* [–FIN] *at-home*
     ‘This person went astray.’   ‘I’d prefer for this person to stay at home.’

Demonstratives with Proper Nouns

Finally, demonstratives combine even with proper names to yield structures like those in (8):

(8) a Muiris Bhidí seo
     ‘this person Muiris Bhidí’   (SHS 45)

    b Peigí Bhrocach seo
     ‘this person Peigí Bhrocach’   (SSOTC 312)

    c Jackie seo (SHS 201)
     ‘this Jackie person’

    d Bhí urradh as   miosúr   i nGoll seo
     was strength out-of measure in   DEM
     ‘This guy Goll had astonishing strength.’   (SHS 175)

    e Burton Conyngham seo
     ‘this guy Burton Conyngham’   (SgC023)

Note that this usage is not associated with a use of the proper name as an identifier of a set of people all of whom bear the same name (as in ‘Every Robin I know is a man.’) The typical use is rather to refer again to a recently-introduced discourse referent who has been named.

Demonstratives with Vocatives

For completeness, it is worth adding that the demonstrative particles may also combine with vocatives:

(9) a   a   bhean   seo
       VOC *woman* DEM

   b   a   bhean   udaí
       VOC *woman* DEM

It is not easy to render such usages accurately in English, but (9b) might be something like: 'Hey you over there!' when addressed to a woman.

A Generalization

The syntax of vocatives is mysterious enough that it's not clear what to make of this last observation, but overall the generalization that emerges from these observations seems clear enough—demonstrative particles in Irish combine with definite DP's of all types. Their use with the definite article is just one sub-part of this larger pattern, and there are in fact no discontinuous determiners.

A straightforward way of capturing this pattern is to assume that the Demonstrative 'particles' are heads (possibly themselves D) which select definite DP's. The 'bare' use seen in (6) can be understood now as the intransitive variant of the demonstrative head.

This conclusion is also reached, on more or less independent grounds, by Doyle (2002: 173–182).

In accounting for the word order facts, we could assume either that the head-final order is underived (i.e. this head takes its complement on the left), or else we could assume that the demonstrative head has some property which forces raising of a definite DP from within its domain to its specifier. (See Doyle (2002: 179–180) for an interesting proposal about what the crucial property may be.)
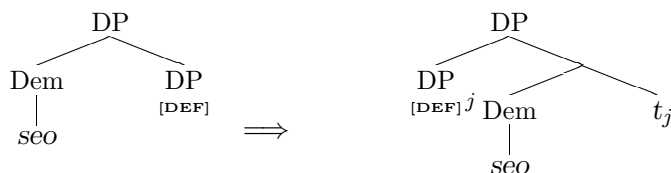
The first of these options goes against the grain of most syntactic work these days, and most or many theoreticians would be unwilling to cede to a given head the ability to determine whether its complement appeared on the right or on the left. However evidence from within the language itself for chosing one or other option is not easy to come by. We will consider one possible argument below.

For the moment, I am most interested in the general conclusion that demonstratives in Irish are heads which select definite DP's.[2]

---

[2] Leaving open the possibility that the selectional relation is perhaps mediated by functional structure below the demonstrative head. The kind of movement illustrated in (9) is informulable given the theory of Bare Phrase Structure, and is explicitly banned in ongoing work by David Pesetsky and Ester Torrego. The basic analysis sketched here will however survive if there is functional structure below Dem. An exactly parallel set of issues arises with respect to the universal quantifier *uilig*, which also appears in apparently head-final structures:

(i)   na   bádaí móra   uilig
      the boats large all
      "all the large boats"

Coordination

This general idea immediately makes sense of the kind of coordination data seen in (10):

(10)   na fir   agus na mná   sin   . . .
        the men and the women DEM
        'those men and women . . .'

(10) now simply reflects the expected possibility that the definite DP-complement of Dem might be a coordinate DP. It is less obvious how it should be understood if *na . . . seo* is a discontinuous determiner.

Base Generation or Movement?

An argument for the raising analysis sketched above can perhaps be built from observations concerning the element *eile* meaning 'other'. The commonest use of this element is seen in the schematic structure given in (11), exemplified in (12):

(11)   [DP (D) (Num) N (AP) (AP) . . . *eile* (RC)]

(12)   na ceithre bádaí móra eile   a bhí   sa   chuan
        the four   boats big other C *be* PAST *in-the harbour*
        'the four other large boats that were in the harbour'

The element appears after all the post-nominal adjectives, but precedes relative clauses, which are always in absolute final position within DP. *Eile* attach to certain indefinite pronouns, such as the interrogative in (13):

(13)   Cé eile a bhí   i láthair?
        who other C *be* PAST *present*
        'Who else was present?'

In this and similar uses, it seems to be strandable under movement. Consider, for instance, (14), which probably involves raising of the interrogative pronoun from within the complement domain of the preposition to its specifier position:

(14)   Cé leis   a raibh   tú ag caint   _ ?
        who with-him C *be* PAST *you talk* [PROG]
        'Who were you talking to?'

When the pronoun in question is modified by *eile*, the only possible outcome is the one in (15), with *eile* separated from the pronoun it modifies:

(15)   Cé leis   eile   a raibh   tú ag caint   _ ?
        who with-him other C *be* PAST *you talk* [PROG]
        'Who else were you talking to?'

This observation seems to suggest that *eile* can be stranded when the element to which it attaches undergoes movement.

    A similar phenomenon can be seen with free relatives. Free relatives in Irish take the form schematized in (16):

(16)   [DP [C*pro* [TP . . . _ . . .]]]

A typical example is (17):

(17) Bhí   súile [$_{DP}$ a raibh   __ sa   teach] orainn
      be **PAST** *eyes*   **C** *be* **PAST**   *in-the house*   *on-us*
      'The eyes of everyone who was in the house were on us.'

That is, such structures have the distribution of DP's (appearing, for example, in possessor position in (17)), but in terms of their internal structure, they apparently consist only of a CP—one which is headed by the 'indirect relative' complementizer and which contains a gap created by Ā-movement. Such structures clearly involve movement (probably of a pronominal operator) from the position of the gap to the head of the clause. In that light, consider (18):

(18) i dteannta a raibh   __ eile   ina leith
      along-with **C** *be* **PAST**   *other in-its-favour*
      'along with all the others who were in favour of it'   (U 364)

What we have in (18) is an occurence of *eile* in the position of the gap but modifying an element with much higher scope. The obvious (and I think correct) analysis is that *eile* begins its syntactic life as a modifier of the element (a 'pronominal operator') which undergoes Ā-movement, and that it is stranded when that operator undergoes fronting.

There is reason to believe, then, that there is something about the syntax of *eile* which means that it can be stranded, at least in certain circumstances, under movement.

Consider, in that light, the interaction of this element with the demomstrative particles. The relevant examples are ones like 'this other man'. In fact (at least in many dialects) there are two word order possibilities in such a case:

(19) a an fear seo   eile
        the man **DEM** *other*
        'this other man'

     b an fear eile   seo
        the man other **DEM**
        'this other man'

(19a) can be understood as another instance of stranding of *eile* under movement, if the definite DP raises to the specifier position of *seo*. Stranding must be regarded as optional, to also allow for (19b). It is much less clear how (19a) might be accounted for on an analysis in which the definite DP was merged directly as the complement of Dem.

This argument has a certain appeal, but is clearly weakened by the fact that hardly anything is at present understood about the syntax of the element *eile*.

A more secure argument can, I believe, be constructed from the interaction between demonstratives and possessors, but there is too much about that interaction that I do not understand for me to be able to develop that argument here.

Department of Linguistics
University of California, Santa Cruz
Santa Cruz, California 95064

mcclosk@ucsc.edu
http://people.ucsc.edu/˜mcclosk

References

Cinque, Guglielmo. 1993. On the evidence for partial N-movement in the romance DP. MS., Università de Venezia.

Doyle, Aidan. 2002. *Covert and overt pronominals in Irish.* Lublin, Poland, Wydawnictwo Folium.