Prosodic Verb Phrase Ellipsis in Irish[1]
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Introduction

- Most of the literature on VP ellipsis has concentrated on the properties of the ellipsis site.
- I'm going to concentrate on the properties of what's left behind.
- In particular, its prosodic properties, and its interaction with the prosodic effects of focus.
- This is within a larger model I'm developing of ellipsis targeting prosodic domains to leave behind, (partially) dependent on focus structure.

Irish VP ellipsis

- Irish is VSO, derived from raising of the finite verb to T (or something high in the functional hierarchy), over the subject, which stays low (within the VP, let's pretend).
- Tense/aspect/modality/polarity information may be encoded on suffixal verb inflections as well as on a 'preverb,' which is a portmanteau of C, Σ, and T, proclitic on the verb.
- The subject immediately follows the finite verb, and in most cases, nothing may intervene.
- Irish has a process of ellipsis that strands the finite verb, while deleting the subject and the object.
- Traditional grammars typically call it 'responsive ellipsis,' because it is commonly used in yes/no question answers, Irish lacking words for 'yes' and 'no.'

(1) A: Ar chuir   tú   isteach air?
      Q put.PST 2sg in   on.3sg
      'Did you apply for it?'

   B: Chuir ~~mé isteach air~~.
     put.PST
     'I did.'

- This ellipsis is also found in coordinate structures (2), tag questions (3), intersententially in discourse (4), in *as*-clauses (5) and *as-as*-clauses (6).

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(2) Dúirt sé go dtiocfadh   sé agus tháinig ~~sé~~.
said   3sg C come.COND 3sg and come.PST
'He said he would come and he did.'

(3) Cheannaigh siad teach, nár   cheannaigh ~~siad teach~~?
buy.PST   3pl   house NEG.PST.Q buy.PST
'They bought a house, didn't they?'

(4) A: Cheannaigh siad teach.
      buy.PST   3pl   house
      'They bought a house.'

   B: Níor cheannaigh ~~siad teach~~.
      NEG.PST buy.PST
      'No, they didn't.'

(5) Bhí   cineál náire air   faoina   sceitheadh mar a bhíodh ~~náire air~~
    be.PST sort   shame at.3SG about.3SG betrayal   as C be.PST.HAB

    agus é   ina   ghasúr beag
    and   3SG in.3SG boy   small
    'He was sort of ashamed of his betrayal, as he had been when he was a
    small boy.'

(6) ligean chun an mhianaigh chomh hóg   agus a lig   ~~sé chun an mhianaigh é~~
    letting to   the mine   as   young as   C let.PST
    'sending him to the mine as young as he did'

- These are all analogous to the structure and discourse function of VP ellipsis in
  English (though the absence of comparatives is a bit odd).
- McCloskey (1991) has argued that Irish responsive ellipsis in in fact the analogue
  of English VP ellipsis, based on ACD, island-insensitivity and strict/sloppy
  reading ambiguities.
- I have more arguments in the paper from periphrastic tenses, backwards data, etc.
  that show further analogues to VP ellipsis.
- Goldberg (2005) argued responsive ellipsis was a case of V-stranding VP-ellipsis,
  because it elides the subject in most cases, but strands the verb.
- This is expected, if the ellipsis site (the VP) contains both the subject and object,
  but not the raised verb.
- There is also a same-verb restriction, as in most cases of V-stranding VPE,
  because the VP-internal V trace is relevant for the calculation of semantic identity.
- This means that the contrastive element necessary for ellipsis will typically be
  tense/aspect/modality, or polarity.
- In these cases, if there is a strong emphatic focus, pronominal subjects are not
  elided:

(7) A: Ní   raibh tú   ag iarraidh jabanna a chur i   mbaol?
       NEG be.PST you at trying   jobs   to put in danger
       'You weren't trying to put jobs at risk?'

    B: Ní   raibh *mé* ~~ag iarraidh jabanna a chur i   mbaol~~.
       NEG be.pst me
       'I *wasn't*.'

(8) A: Amharc orm.
       look   on.1sg
       'Look at me.'

    B: Amharc ort?   Nach   bhfuil *mé* ~~ag amharc ort~~?
       look   on.2sg NEG.Q be   1sg
       'Look at you? *Aren't* I?'

(9) A: Tá mé ag scríobh síos na haistriúcháin seo.
       be 1sg at writing down the translations this
       'I'm writing down these translations.'

    B: An bhfuil *tú* ~~ag scríobh síos na haistriúcháin seo~~?
       Q   be   2sg
       '*Are* you?'

- This contrasts with the 'ordinary' result of VPE on a similar sentence without the emphatic focus, like (10).

(10) Dúirt   mé go   raibh mé ag cur jabanna i mbaol, ach ní   raibh.
     say.PST me that be.PST me at put jobs   in danger but NEG be.PST
     'I said I was putting jobs at risk, but I wasn't.'

- In non-emphatic cases, the pronominal subject is elided.
- Non-pronominal subjects can not escape ellipsis in cases of emphatic focus:

(11) A: Tá Seán ag scríobh síos   na haistriúcháin seo.
       be S.   at writing down the translations this
       'Sean is writing down these translations.'

    B: *An bhfuil *Seán* ~~ag scríobh síos na haistriúcháin seo~~?
        Q   be   S.
        '*Is* Sean?'

- Notice that just having tense/aspect/modality/polarity in contrast isn't sufficient to provide the right kind of focus (see (4)).

- There has to be a strong emphatic focus on the relevant element. So the meaning of the answer in (7) is something like, 'I *really* wasn't.'

Null arguments and subject positions

Null arguments:

- There is a potential question whether this process is ellipsis or just a null argument construction.
- Irish does allow null arguments sometimes; it is described in some sources as a *pro*-drop language.
- Normally only the subject can be dropped.
- Unlike, say, Romance *pro*-drop languages, only certain agreeing verb forms (the 'synthetic' forms) may cooccur with null arguments.
- The presence of an 'analytic' form is usually held to be diagnostic of an overt subject (McCloskey & Hale 1984).
- Goldberg (2005) noted that all the relevant VPE constructions may occur with analytic forms just as easily as synthetic forms (see (2-5)), so they cannot be null argument forms in the *pro*-drop sense.
- Additionally, objects cannot be *pro*-dropped in Irish, and VPE also elides objects in transitive structures (see (3, 5, 8)).
- Another empirical difference between *pro*-drop and VPE is that only VPE can elide the main verb in periphrastic tenses (see (7-9)).

Subject positions:

- A syntactic account of the variable ellipsis domains is *a priori* possible here; the emphatic focus construction could trigger a higher position for the subject, where it is raised out of the domain of ellipsis (the VP).
- Irish has been demonstrated to have multiple subject positions, one high, one low.
- BUT: the different subject positions have interpretive consequences, and pronominals are not typically allowed in the higher position (only indefinites).
- Also, the subject itself is not interpreted differently in any of the relevant focus constructions. Some head in the functional hierarchy, like T or the polarity head Σ, is.
- Emphatic focus on these heads all have equal effects on ellipsis domains, but the features associated with these heads do not have equal involvement in licensing subject positions.

'Emphatic' focus and pitch accents

- One clue to what's going on here is that the unelided subject pronoun bears the pitch accent associated with the emphatic focus, even though it syntactically appears on something like tense/aspect/modality/polarity.

- This is true in emphatic focus constructions with pronominal subjects even in non-ellipsis environments. In fact any emphatic pitch accent surfacing on the sequence of (preverb + verb + pronominal subject) surfaces on the subject:

(10) A: Cuir síos   é.
        put down 3sg
        'Put it down.'

   B: Ní   rachaidh *sé*   sios.
        NEG go.FUT   3sg down
        'It won't *go* down.'
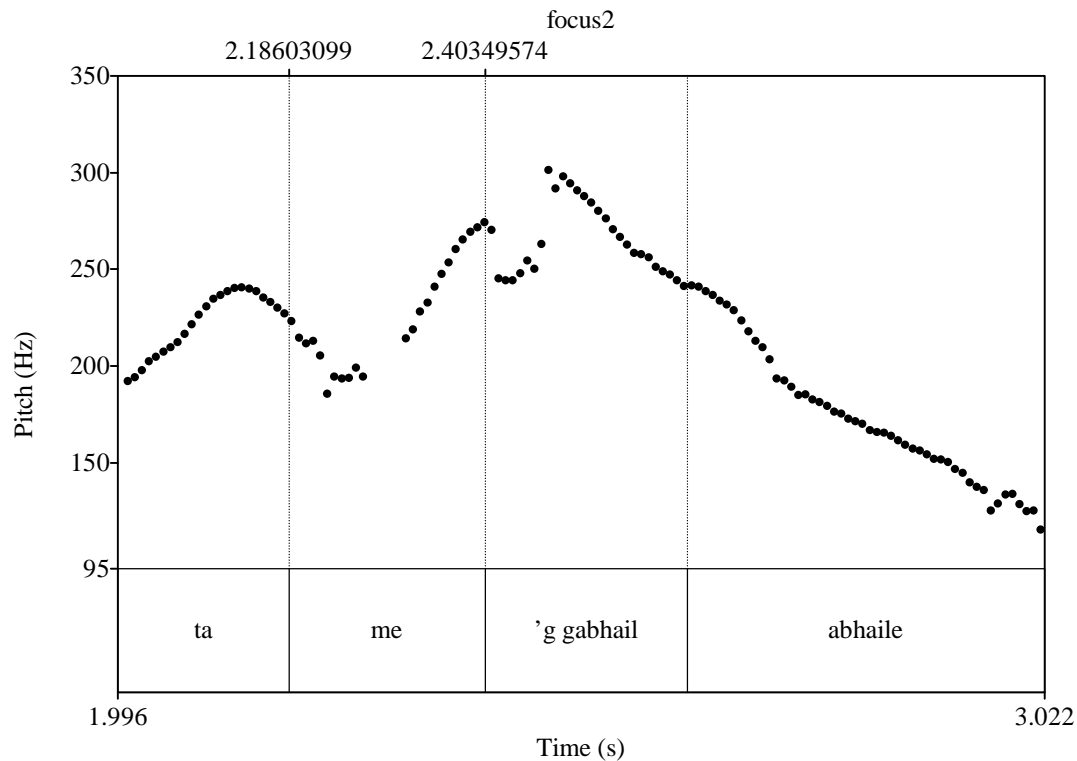
(11) A: An ndéanfaidh siad é?
        Q   do.FUT   3pl 3sg
        'Will they do it?'

   B: Caithfidh *siad* é   a dhéanamh.
        must   3pl   3sg to do
        'They *have* to do it.'

(12) A: Bain giota dó   'na   bhaile.
        take bit   to.3sg in.the house
        'Get on home.'

   B: Tá *mé* ag gabhail abhaile.
        be 1sg at getting home
        'I'm *going* home.'

- Take a look at the pitch track:

focus2

2.18603099   2.40349574

| ta | me | 'g gabhail | abhaile |

1.996   3.022

Time (s)

Pitch (Hz)

- Pitch accents on synthetic forms occur on the inflectional suffix.

(13) A: Ní   dhéanfainn a leithéid.
      Neg do.COND.1sg its like
      'I wouldn't do such a thing.'

   B: Dhéan*fá* ~~a leithéid~~.
     do.COND.2sg
     You *would*.

                                      (from Doron 1988)

- Similiarly for analytic forms with non-pronominal subjects:

(14) Dhéan*fadh* Seán é.
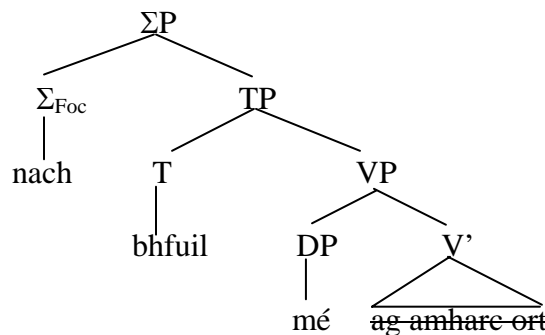   do.COND   S. it
    'Sean *would* do it.'

- Chung & McCloskey (1987) observed that the pitch accent is targeting the right edge of the prosodic domain formed by the verb-subject combination in all of these cases, synthetic or analytic.
- Note that this is not true for cases where the focus is *interpreted* on the subject.
- Pronominal subject focus is handled with a set of contrastive suffixes that occur only on pronouns, and no pitch accent occurs anywhere.

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- Pronouns are in fact generally prohibited from bearing contrastive pitch accents, with the peculiar exception of those accents associated with the inflected verb to their left (if the subject is contrastive, VPE is not available, because subjects count toward VP identity).

**The prosodic structure of the finite verb**

- Syntactically, the combination of verb and pronominal subject should be surprising. The subject stays low and isn't syntactically incorporated into the verb head:

(15)

```
                    ΣP
             _____|_____
            |             |
          Σ_Foc          TP
            |        _____|_____
           nach     |           |
                    T           VP
                    |        ___|___
                  bhfuil     |       |
                            DP      V'
                            |      _/\_
                            mé   a̶g̶ a̶m̶h̶a̶r̶c̶ o̶r̶t̶
```

- Pronominal subjects are uniformly enclitic on finite verbs in Irish. My theory in my QE was that the combination of the verb and pronominal subject is best handled as a nested prosodic word:

(16)

```
              ω max
            _/ |
          ω    |
         / \   |
        |  ω min|
        |   |   |
      nach bhfuil *mé*
```
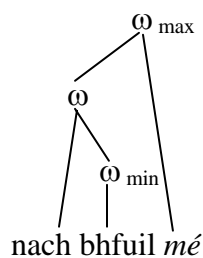
- The lower prosodic word, which does not contain the subject, is 'minimal,' in Junko & Armin's terms, and the uppermost one, including the subject, is 'maximal.'

- So this seems to provide a way of accounting for the ellipsis facts using prosody.

  - ➢ The pitch accent targets the right edge of the *maximal* prosodic word containing the contrastive element (in this case Σ)
  - ➢ Impressionistically, the VPE remnant is the *smallest* prosodic domain *containing the pitch accent* (possibly the minimal word).

- In the non-focus case, the smallest prosodic domain containing the pitch accent is the minimal word, because there is no pitch accent.
- In the emphatic focus case, you have to pick the maximal word, because the pitch accent has already been assigned to the pronoun at the right edge of the domain, so the minimal word won't contain it.
- Emphatic focus synthetic forms only contain one prosodic word, simultaneously minimal and maximal, because they are affixal, and not adjunction structures:

(17)

ω
|
[dhéanfá]
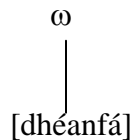
- On this view, the reason pronouns cannot generally bear contrastive pitch accents is that these pitch accents require a prosodic word.
- Pronouns can bear these pitch accents only if they are within a lexically-headed maximal prosodic word.
- Put another way, emphatic focus is a head feature, and pronominals cannot head prosodic words.
- This also explains why only pronominal subjects can escape ellipsis this way; only pronominal subjects are prosodically dependent on the verb.
- This account also explains why synthetic forms are stranded by ellipsis intact, even though I argued in my QE that they are derived from incorporation of a subject, which *a priori* should be elided.
- The lack of recursive prosodic structure means that an affixal synthetic form will be the smallest word-level domain available.
- Basically, ellipsis 'follows' incorporation and targets the prosodic structure that results from it.

Left-contexts and focus

- In the larger model under development, the kind of material left behind by VPE, like sluicing and NPE, is a 'left context.'
- Left contexts may contain multiple focal pitch accents, and they may also be entirely devoid of pitch accents in some cases.
- Left contexts under some circumstances may also be extended to the right to include pitch accents from outside of their usual domain.
- Another case where it has been proposed that the left-context in (constituent) ellipsis can be extended to the right to cover pitch accents is Tami Schuyler's data from English VPE and sluicing:

  ➢ VPE is not possible if sluicing is:

(18)   *Mary was kissing someone, but I don't know who she was.

> ➢ However, VPE is required if a focus is outside the sluicing domain:

(19)   I don't know who *John* will kiss, but I know who *Susan* will.

- o Here the choice of ellipsis processes is sensitive to the presence of focus, and the sluicing left context can be extended to the right to include it.
- o Schuyler (2001) proposed that the ellipsis process is sensitive to the presence of focus features in the syntax.
- o Takahashi & Fox (2005) propose that ellipsis targets the 'largest elidable constituent' within the 'parallelism domain' (in this case the clause). Focused material is not elidable.
- However, in the Irish data, it is clear that the important part is the pitch accent, not the position of the focus in the syntax, because they are dislocated on the surface, and the focus marking in the syntax is outside the ellipsis site in any case.
- Only prosodic structure can determine the Irish VPE left context.

Conclusion

- Irish VP ellipsis shows that the left context that remains after VPE must be sensitive to the presence of prosodic pitch accents associated with focus.
- Sensitivity to the presence of focus features in the syntax does not accurately predict the domain of VPE in Irish.
- In particular, a Takahashi & Fox style analysis where focused constituents are unelidable will be insufficient, because the focused constituent is outside the ellipsis domain in any case.
- There is evidence for internal structure at the ellipsis site (Merchant's stuff, for example), but there is also evidence that this structure is not the same as the surface syntax of the antecedent (Dan Hardt's stuff for example).
- So if ellipsis is no mere surface post-syntactic deletion of completely ordinary output from the narrow syntax, one way to make sense of its prosodically delimited character is to view prosody as a filter on syntactic outputs.

Issues

- Why does the pitch accent target the *right* edge of the prosodic word? Irish has strong initial stress normally. Stipulation is a perfectly acceptable solution, but it would be nice to have something else.
- I'm assuming a difference (which is audible) between the somehow relevant sort of 'strong' contrastive pitch accent, and some less strong pitch accent, which is irrelevant, but exists anyway. (For example, in y/n question answers, the contrastive element is polarity, but the subject doesn't get a pitch accent, and pronominal subjects are elided). What exactly is the difference here? Selkirk has a good typology of features I think, with the F for informational focus and the FOC for contrastive focus, but I might need to draw the line *within* the contrastive focus cases, to capture the difference between yes/no question answers and the

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cases under investigation. For the moment, I'm calling the relevant intonation 'emphatic' focus, following a number of other writers, but it would be nice not to need another feature.

- The subject doesn't actually stay within the VP, based on some good evidence. So this isn't really VP-ellipsis. It's *v*P ellipsis, or AgrP ellipsis, or something. This could be crosslinguistic evidence that VPE doesn't target syntactic domains...
- VP-peripheral adverbials and pseudogapping remnants.

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