Pronouns Postpose at PF

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1 Introducing Pronoun Postposing

The phenomenon of weak Pronoun Postposing in Irish (1) and Scottish Gaelic (2) (Chung and McCloskey 1987, Duffield 1995, Adger 1997, Doyle 1998, Doyle 2002, McCloskey 1999) is unusual in that it involves the rightward placement of a prosodically and informationally light element:

(1) a. Bhris sé an chathaoir leis an ord aréir.
broke he the chair with the hammer last night
'He broke the chair with the hammer last night.'

b. Bhris sé leis an ord aréir í.
broke he with the hammer last night it-FEM
'He broke it with the hammer last night.'

(2) a. Chunnaic mi an t-each anns a' gharradh an dè.
Saw I the horse in the garden yesterday
'I saw the horse in the garden yesterday.'

b. Chunnaic mi anns a' gharradh an dè e.
Saw I in the garden yesterday it-MASC
'I saw it in the garden yesterday.'

Treating this movement at face value, as a rightwards and syntactic movement, (as did Chung and McCloskey 1987) makes it theoretically extremely unusual. Most of the authors mentioned above have instead queried either the rightwardness of the movement (Duffield 1995, Kayne 2000) or its syntactic nature (Adger 1997, McCloskey 1999). In this squib, I offer a new argument for the latter position.

The argument comes from the interaction of Pronoun Postposing with ellipsis. I show that the derivational point at which ellipsis takes place must precede Pronoun Postposing (within any local domain), and further that ellipsis has the character of a PF-deletion operation. On the assumption that syntactic and PF processes cannot interleave within a single local domain, it follows that Pronoun Postposing is post-syntactic. I focus on examples from Scottish Gaelic in this squib.

2 Scottish Gaelic is not pro-drop

Since we are going to look at operations which delete pronouns, we must first be sure that Scottish Gaelic is not, for the relevant cases, pro-drop. This can be easily seen from the following examples:

(3) Chunnaic *(mi) an t-each
Saw I the horse
'I saw the horse'

(4) Chunnaic an t-each *(mi)
Saw the horse I
'The horse saw me.'

The same pattern is replicated with the other pronouns with one exception. The only cases where a pronoun can be dropped in a simple finite clause are the first person singular/plural conditional. In these cases, pronouns are obligatorily dropped (see Hale and McCloskey 1984 for Irish and Adger 2000 for Gaelic).

(5) a. Bhuailinn (*mi) an t-each
Hit-1SG.COND I the horse
'I would hit the horse.'
b. Bhuaileamaid (*sinn) an t-each
Hit-1PL.COND we the horse
'We would hit the horse.'

3 The target of ellipsis

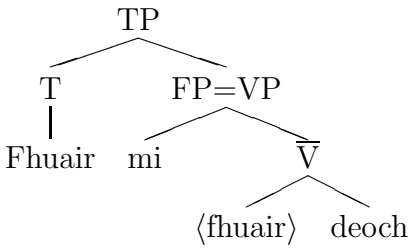
As shown by McCloskey (1991), Irish has a process that targets the complement of the position where the finite verb is situated. This is found in responses to questions. The same phenomenon is found in Gaelic:

(6) An d'fhuair thu deoch fhathast?
Q got you drink yet
'Have you had a drink yet?'

(7) a. Fhuair.
got
'Yes.'
b. Cha d'fhuair.
NEG got
'No.'

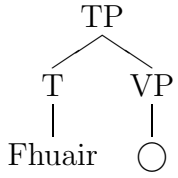
McCloskey shows that these constructions involve ellipsis of the category that is complement to the position of the finite verb. That is, on the assumption that the verb is in T, the responsives are formed by elliding the some FP complement of T, whose specifier the subject fills (McCloskey (2001) argues that FP is not VP or vP in Irish, but this is irrelevant for our purposes here. I'll assume it is VP with a VP internal subject, for concreteness).

(8)



There are two broad approaches to the analysis of ellipsis: one idea is that ellipsis is a simple PF deletion process (see, e.g. Merchant 2001 for a recent defense), the other is that it involves a null pronominal element in the syntax, with semantic procedures to allow resolution of the ellipsis (see, e.g. Lobeck 1995). As noted by Merchant (2001, p71) the latter approach cannot be correct for the structures under investigation here. If it were, we would have the following structure:

(9)



However, now the raised verb in T has no trace to bind (or, derivationally speaking, no source). We therefore adopt the idea that ellipsis in these constructions is a PF-deletion process.

We find the same kind of ellipsis phenomenon in answers to wh-questions, and in locally licensed ellipsis in declaratives (examples from Mark 1986):

(10) a. Cò bhuaithe a fhuair thu an sgeul seo?
Who from that got you the story this
'Who did you get this story from?'
b. Fhuair bho Fhergas.
got from Fergus
'From Fergus.'

(11) a. Càit an do dh'fhàg thu do leabhar?
Where prt past left you your book
'Where did you leave your book?'
b. Dh'fhàg anns an sgoil.
Left in the school
'In school.'

(12) Chan eil fios agam am faca e an tubaist, ach ma chunnaic, cha
NEG be knowledge at-me if saw he the accident, but if saw, NEG
d'thuirt e smid.
said e word
'I don't know if he saw the accident, but if he did, he didn't say anything.'

(13) Smaoinich mi gun do dh'fhàg mi mo leabhar agus dh'fhàg aig an sgoil
Thought I that PAST left I my book and left at the school
'I thought I left my book and I had left it at school.'

4 Pronouns in ellipsis

Let us assume that there is a syntactic account of weak pronoun postposing along the lines of Duffield 1995. Under such an account, the pronoun first moves leftwards to a high position, and then the remainder of the clause moves around it:

(14)

[TP Saw I it yesterday]
↓
[it] [TP Saw I t yesterday]
↓
[TP Saw I t yesterday] [it] t

Given that ellipsis is a PF process, we should now be able to ellipt the VP constituent containing the trace:

(15) [TP Saw ~~I t~~ yesterday] [it] t

This predicts the following:

(16) a. Am faca tu an tubaist?
Q saw you the accident
'Did you see the accident?'
b. *Chunnaic an dè i
saw yesterday it-FEM
'I saw it yesterday.'

The required response is rather:

(17) Chunnaic an dè.
saw yesterday
'I saw it yesterday.'

We find the same pattern in wh-answers and in declarative ellipsis:

(18) a. Cò bhuaithe a fhuair thu an sgeul seo?
Who from that got you the story this
'Who did you get this story from?'
b. Fhuair bho Fhergas (*e).
got from Fergus (*it-MASC)
'I got it from Fergus.'

(19) Smaoinich mi gun do dh'fhàg mi mo leabhar agus dh'fhàg aig an sgoil (*e).
Thought I that PAST left I my book and left at the school (*it-MASC)
'I thought I left my book and I had left it at school.'

In order to rule out such examples, an extra assumption needs to be made. For example, one could argue that XP-traces cannot be ellipted. However, this seems unlikely, given the existence of sluicing in the language:

(20) Smaoinich mi gun do dh'fhàg mi mo leabhar ach chan eil fhios agam
Thought I that PAST left I my book but NEG be knowledge at-me
càit.
where
'I thought I left my book but I don't know where.'

Defending this kind of assumption ends up simply stipulating the illformedness of the structures.

These conclusions also hold for an analysis which adopts a low movement of the weak pronoun, followed by remnant movement of the VP, as follows (see Kayne 1994 for a similar approach to Heavy NP Shift, and McCloskey 1999 for a different argument against this derivation for Pronoun Postposing):

(21)

[VP I saw it]
↓
[saw [VP I t it]]
↓
[it] [saw [VP I t t]]
↓
yesterday [it] [saw [VP I t t]]
↓
[saw [VP I t t]] yesterday [it] t

Once again, there is nothing to stop us ellipting the VP, giving (22), and predicting the wrong pattern of welll-formedness:

(22) [saw [VP ~~I t t~~]] yesterday [it] t

I should also note here that a simple rightwards movement in the syntax gives the wrong results (Chung and McCloskey 1987):

(23)

[TP Saw I it yesterday]
↓
[TP Saw I t yesterday] [it]
↓
[TP Saw ~~I t~~ yesterday] [it]

However, if pronoun postposing is a process that can only occur after the derivational point at which ellipsis takes place, then the object pronoun will undergo ellipsis in situ:

(24)

[TP Saw ~~I it~~ yesterday]
↓
* Pronoun Postposing

Once the pronoun is ellipted, there is nothing to move, predicting the correct distribution of the data.

Since a null pronoun theory of ellipsis for the construction under consideration is incompatible with a derivational view of VSO order in the language, ellipsis is a PF deletion process. The arguments above mean that the point in the structure of the grammar at which Pronoun Postposing takes place is after the point at which PF deletion takes place. Hence Pronouns Postpose in the PF component.

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