Dialect Variation in Gaelic Relative Clauses

David Adger (Queen Mary,University of London)
Gillian Ramchand (University of Tromsø)

1   Introduction

In this paper we present some results stemming from a British Academy funded grant,[1] the objective of which was to determine the extent of dialect variation in relative clause constructions in Scottish Gaelic and to provide a theoretical explanation for the structures discovered. The more theoretical outcomes of the project are reported in Adger and Ramchand (2002) and Adger and Ramchand (2005); here we concentrate on providing a theoretically informed description of the patterns we found in the hope that this will be of some use to the community of researchers on the Gaelic language.

2   The Nature of Variation

Languages vary at a number of levels in terms of their syntax. Most obviously, different languages display gross level syntactic variation. For example, the basic word order of a Gaelic finite declarative clause has the finite verb in a pre-subject position, while in a corresponding English declarative finite clause, the finite verb follows the subject. Reversing either of these results in an unacceptable sentence in the respective language (an example which is not a grammatical sentence of the language is marked by a preceding star):

(1) Chunnaic Iain Màiri
     saw   Iain Màiri
     'Ian saw Mary'

(2) * Iain chunnaic Màiri

(3) John saw Mary

(4) * Saw John Mary

   Note that the grammatical sentences from the two languages broadly 'mean the same'. A traditional approach to capturing these crosslinguistic correlations between meaning and form in theoretical syntax is to assign both sentences a similar abstract structure from which the surface syntax deviates in different ways. For example, one could posit a structure where the verb forms a constituent with the object in both languages, but in Gaelic an extra syntactic operation moves the verb to a pre-subject position:

(5) Iain [chunnaic Màiri] → chunnaic Iain [⟨chunnaic⟩ Màiri]

Here the representation to the right of the arrow is one where the verb is displaced from its position (the evacuated position is marked by angled brackets). Evidence that this might be an appropriate way to analyse Gaelic sentence structure comes from the fact that there are other structures where the verb and the object indeed appear adjacent to each other forming a constituent (see Adger (1996) and Ramchand (1997) for discussion of the Gaelic facts and McCloskey (1991) and McCloskey (1996) for arguments from Irish):

(6) Bha   Dàibhidh [a' bualadh a' chait]
    be-PAST David   hitting   the cat
    'David was hitting the cat'

The correctness of this particular analysis as involving a movement operation is not at issue here (there is a debate in the field as to exactly how this particular correlation between form and meaning should be captured—see McCloskey (1983) on Irish, Sproat (1985) on Welsh and Borsley (1990) on Breton); what is important is rather the mode of explanation which associates an abstract representation (which captures the similarity of meaning) with a surface representation (that captures the differences in surface syntax).

So much for variation between languages; what of variability within a language? In many ways this is a vexed question because of the vagueness of the notion of 'a language'. Our commonsense notions of language are essentially political and social constructs which only loosely match up with more technical ideas of grammatical, phonological and lexical similarity. We tend to speak of Chinese as a language, even through the differences in grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation make many of the various dialects of Chinese mutually unintelligible, while we take Swedish and Norwegian to be different languages, although the dialects of these languages spoken close to the borders are in fact mutually intelligible. As has often been remarked, Gaelic and Irish form a (rather messy) continuum of mutual intelligibility from Lewis to Munster, and yet these days we tend to speak of Scottish Gaelic on the one hand and Irish on the other (see Ó Baoill, 2000). Similar points have been made about the Inuit languages, which form a dialect continuum such that geographically close communities of speakers are able to understand each other while speakers from either end of the continuum are not (see Chambers and Trudgill, 1980, for general discussion).

Is it possible, then, to pin down these notions so as to focus on core linguistic facts, rather than on social, geographical and political contingencies? The approach we adopt to this question is to take each speaker to have their own idiolect (usually known as the speaker's I-language, Chomsky, 1986) which is just part of the individual psychology of that speaker. From this perspective, there are as many I-languages as there are people in the world. Some of these I-languages are going to be very similar to each other (so similar as to allow mutual intelligibility) while others will diverge wildly. Of course the reason that some I-languages are similar to each other is due to the fact that an I-language is the result of an individual growing up in a community of speakers, so that that individual's I-language comes to be similar to those of the speakers surrounding him/her.

It follows from this that we will find some variation within a close knit community of speakers who all consider themselves to speak the same dialect (Labov, 1972): people use different forms to convey the same core meanings. The (subconscious or conscious) choice of form might be determined by social factors such as gender or class or age, especially when the language

is undergoing change. For example, there might be certain words, certain pronunciations or certain morphosyntactic structures which are used in conversational style almost exclusively by older speakers (a good example in Gaelic might be the use of genitive rather than nominative case on objects of verbal nouns). Of course decisions about register will also be crucial here (see Lamb, 2002). Moreover, variation is also influenced by purely linguistic factors: for example, the variability in the construction of relative clauses discussed in this paper is influenced by syntactic features and syntactic dependencies. Furthermore, psycholinguistic factors such as the ease of processing a long or complicated utterance also influence choices of variants (see Labov, 1994; 2000). Since a speaker internalizes his or her I-language on the basis of what they hear from other people as they are growing up, and what they hear contains a lot of variation, it is at least plausible that speakers' I-languages themselves admit the possibility of variation. That is, a single I-language allows more than one form to convey a single basic meaning.

This kind of variation has not often been tackled from an I-language perspective (but see Henry, 1995; Wilson and Henry, 1998; and for an alternative perspective Kroch, 1994). One approach (Adger and Smith, 2005; Adger 2005) is to take I-languages to be constituted so as to provide a range of variant forms for a particular meaning. These forms may then be chosen by a speaker in making an utterance. In the absence of other factors, we will find a randomized distribution; however, register, age, social class and psycholinguistic factors may affect this distribution in complex ways. Moreover, prescriptive factors also often impact on speakers' use of variants and their judgments about such variants. For example, prescriptively one might take the genitive case to be the 'correct' form of an object after a verbal noun in Gaelic, judging a speaker who uses either genitive or nominative to make correct or incorrect utterances; in linguistic (rather than social) reality, where we are interested in the linguistic representations an individual speaker's mind creates, no such notion of correctness is relevant. The point is to capture what the speaker's unconscious knowledge of their own I-language is. A good analogy would be the psychology of smell: people react in different ways to different smells, but, except in very restricted communities (wine-tasters, or parfumiers) one wouldn't want to say that certain reactions are correct, or incorrect. If you are interested in the psychology of smell then all of these reactions are important data.

Let us then assume that the notion of I-language is a useful one for our investigation, and moreover that there is a possibility that an individual's I-language may (but may not) produce variant forms. We can then understand dialectal variation to be the result of geographical diffusion over time of speakers who have similar but diverging I-languages. The presence of geographical and social barriers will eventually have an impact, over time and in an extremely complex way, on the forms of individuals' I-languages and how similar to each other these I-languages are. This will result in people from different geographical areas using different forms to convey the same meaning, leading to what we usually term dialects and languages. If social and political facts intervene, this may lead to a particular name for the community language of such groups, but equally it may not. Of course, the fact that certain I-languages are just too different to allow mutual communication may also enter into such decisions about nomenclature. However, from this perspective there is no difference *in principle* in the nature of dialectal and cross-linguistic variation: they both ultimately stem from the fact that human beings allow variation in their I-languages. This viewpoint goes against how we commonly think about dialectal and linguistic variation, but it seems to be the only coherent theoretical position that is consistent with current views in formal syntax.

We can now think of (at least one type of) dialect and language variation as arising when individual level variability for a particular feature is lost, with one dialect opting for variant one and the other opting for variant two (and perhaps another dialect maintaining the variability). This is precisely how we will characterize the variation we find in Gaelic relative clause constructions, looking at speakers from Lewis, Uist and Skye.

In summary, then, we find the following types of variation, which essentially express a cline rather than distinct categories:

- Inter-language variation

- Regional variation between groups of speakers

- Intra-Speaker variation, conditioned by social, grammatical or psycholinguistic factors

Focussing on Gaelic relative clauses, we can ask the question of whether there is variation in the syntax of relative clauses, and where any such variation fits into this typology. We will compare our Gaelic data with data from Irish and we will show that there is cross-linguistic variation. We will then show that there is also geographical and individual level variation, supporting the perspective outlined above.

3   Relative Clauses: Structure and Typology

Let us take a simple relative construction in English:

(7) The boy   [$_{RC}$ that   [I saw]]
     DOMAIN NOUN [$_{RC}$ COMPLEMENTIZER S-REL]

The relative clause itself consists, descriptively, of an initial element *that*, termed a *complementizer*, followed by a sentence with something missing (we will abbreviate this sentence which follows the complementizer as *S-REL*). In the particular case at hand, the object of the verb *see*, which would normally directly follow the verb, is absent. The standard terminology here is to say that there is a *gap* in this position. The relative clause itself functions as a modifier of the *domain noun*, in this case *boy*.

Across languages we find variation in the nature of the complementizer (whether it is present, or absent or specialised to relatives), and in the way the relativised position within S-REL is marked. There is also variation in whether the relative clause follows or precedes its domain noun, and in whether the domain noun is internal or external to the relative clause (see Keenan 1985). Since, in both Gaelic and English, relative clauses follow and are external to their domain nouns, we will ignore such variation here.

Using 'Pseudo-English' as illustrative of some of the distinctions, we can classify the main types of variation that are found:

(8) **A.** *complementizer with gap in relativised position*
     The boy that I saw _
     B. *complementizer with pronoun in relativised position*
     The boy that I saw him.

A′ *Special (= zero in English) complementizer with gap in relativised position*
The boy ∅ I saw _
B′ *Special (= zero in English) complementizer with pronoun in relativised position*
The boy ∅ I saw him
C. *Special relative pronoun instead of complementizer (gap in relativised position)*
The boy who I saw _

We will be concerned with the difference between the gapping strategy (**A**) and the pronoun strategy (**B**) within Irish and Scottish Gaelic and how these strategies correlate with the form of the complementizer, and with variation concerning **A** and a version of **C** as found in Scottish Gaelic dialects.

Looking across languages, we can distinguish a very clear trend with respect to the distribution of the pronoun vs. gapping strategies, based on the following implicational hierarchy:

(9) Subject > Direct Object > Indirect Object > Object of Preposition > Possessor

Based on extensive cross-linguistic work, Keenan and Comrie (1977) have shown that if a language uses a pronoun strategy to relativise over a particular grammatical position on the hierarchy above, then it can use the pronoun strategy for everything else *lower* on that hierarchy. Such pronouns are called *resumptive pronouns*. Conversely, if a language uses a gapping strategy to relativise over a particular grammatical position on the hierarchy above, then it can use the gapping strategy for everything *higher* on the hierarchy (see also Keenan, 1985). We will see that Irish and Scottish Gaelic fit fairly neatly into this typology.

4   Irish

In Irish, two complementizers are used in relative clauses. The complementizers are both schwa [ə] phonologically, but they cause different consonantal mutations on the following segment: the first lenites (so we abbreviate it as *aL*) while the second eclipses (this is abbreviated as *aN* to recall the nasalisation effect that this complementizer often has). *aL* obligatorily occurs with a gap strategy for the relative clause (McCloskey, 1979; 1985 and Ó Curnáin, to appear):

(10) An scríbhneoir aL mholann na mic léinn
     the writer   *aL* praise   the students
     'The writer that the students praise'

In contrast, *aN* occurs with a pronoun:

(11) An scríbhneoir aN molann na mic léinn é
     the writer   *aN* praise   the students him
     'The writer that the students praise'

However, there are further restrictions on when these strategies are possible. For example, *aN* and its associated resumptive pronoun are required for relativisation of arguments of prepositions and possessors:

(12) an ghirseach a dtabharann tú   an t-airgead di
     the girl   *aN* give   you the money   to-3FS
     'The girl that you give the money to (her)

(13) an ghirseach a   bhfuil   a   máthair breoite
     the girl   *aN* be-PRES her mother ill
     'the girl whose mother is ill'

On the other hand, *aL* is required for relativisation over Subject positions:[2]

(14) an fear   a   dhíol (*sé) an domhan
     the man aL sold (*he) the world
     'the man who sold the world'

(15) *an fear a   ndíolann sé an domhan
     the man aN sells   he the world
     'the man who sells the world'

Overall, then, Irish has three different complementizers: *aL* for relative clauses containing a 'gap' ; *aN* for relative clauses containing a 'resumptive' pronoun, and one other complementizer, *go*, which is used for simple complementation:

(16) Deir sé go dtuigeann   sé an scéal
     says he C understands he the story
     'He says that he understands the story'

The resumptive pronoun strategy is possible everywhere except for the Highest Subject position, but is forced with the object of prepositions and possessors. This is very much in line with the expectations set up on the basis of previous typological work:

(17)   **Subject   Direct Object   Object of P   Possessor**
     GAP   <——————————————-
     PRONOUN   ——————————————————————————>

5   Scottish Gaelic

In this section we outline our findings about Scottish Gaelic relativization. The data are based on interviews with twenty two speakers, but for the discussion below sixteen were selected (we leave out the data for Harris and Barra speakers). All were native speakers of Gaelic who had had the language from birth and had continued to use it throughout their lives; the youngest was mid 30s and the oldest was over 70. Seven were from Skye, five from Uist and four from Lewis. In general we found a continuum effect, so that the Lewis and Skye speakers were maximally different from each other, with the Uist speakers coming somewhere in between. We did not split the Skye speakers into North and South varieties, due to the small numbers. These small numbers of speakers means that what we say should be taken as indicative rather than definitive.

The methodology of the project was based on a technique which is fairly standard in theoretical approaches to syntax: the informant judgment task (IJT). In an IJT, the native speaker

of the language is presented with an exemplar of the structure which is of interest to the investigator and is asked to judge whether the sentence is an acceptable example of the language or not. The judgment is, then, one of acceptability; it is not, in the first instance, a judgment of grammaticality. Because sentences can be unacceptable for a range of reasons, the investigator must then attempt to determine whether a judgment of unacceptability is due to semantic, pragmatic or grammatical factors. In practice this is done by exclusion and further testing: test sentences are designed so that semantic and pragmatic factors do not intervene, and speakers are presented with multiple examples of the same structure to test consistency.

We begin by examining an area on which there was broad agreement: the possibility of the resumptive pronoun strategy.

5.1 Gapping vs. Resumptives

Unlike Irish, Gaelic uses just one complementizer in relative clauses: *a*

(18) an duine a bhuaileas e
        the man *a* hit-REL   he
        'the man that he will hit'

Like the Irish *aL*, *a* lenites and obligatorily occurs with a gap. In contrast to Irish, there is no resumptive pronoun strategy, and no specialised complementizer (analogous to *aN*):

(19) *an duine a bhuaileas/ gum buail   e   e
        the man   *a* hit-REL/   that hit-FUT he him
        'the man that he will hit him'

However, Gaelic also differs from Irish in that it allows relativisation into a prepositional phrase using the *a* complementizer (recall that in Irish such constructions required the *aN* complementizer and the pronominal strategy). A large majority of our Skye and Uist speakers allowed examples like the following (we return to the alternative structure preferred by our Lewis speakers in the next section):

(20) Seo a' chaileag a bha   thu a' bruidhinn ris
        this the girl   *a* be-PAST you at speaking   with-3MS
        'This is the girl you were talking to'

A fully agreeing preposition signalling the presence of a pronoun was judged by all seventeen of our speakers as ungrammatical (although see Gillies, 1993, p219, for contradictory data):[3]

(21) *Seo a' chaileag a bha   thu a' bruidhinn rithe
        this the girl   *a* be-PAST you at speaking   with-3MS
        'This is the girl you were talking to'

Note that the example in 20 is not equivalent to the English construction where the preposition is bare. None of our speakers accepted examples like the following:

(22) *Seo a' chaileag a bha   thu a' bruidhinn ri
     this the girl   *a* be-PAST you at speaking   with
     'This is the girl you were talking to'

So relativisation into a prepositional phrase does not leave a simple gap (like English), nor does it allow a fully fledged pronoun (signalled by the presence of agreement for person, number and gender), distinguishing it from Irish, in which such agreement is mandatory. Rather what we find is something in-between (see Adger and Ramchand, (2005), for an argument that we have a special kind of empty pronoun in this position).

We found relativisation over possessors to be generally variable across dialects of Scottish Gaelic (speakers generally accepted them but usually preferred circumlocutions).

(23) Seo an duine a bha   a mhàthair tinn
     This the man *a* be-PAST his mother   sick
     'This is the man whose mother was sick'

Given the ungrammaticality of (21) and the lack of agreement on the stranded preposition, we conclude that Scottish Gaelic does not have a true resumptive pronoun strategy at all; rather it has something akin to, although not identical to, the 'gap' strategy. As we would predict from the accessibility hierarchy this strategy gets worse and worse as we move down the scale.

(24)

	Subject	**Direct Object**	**Object of P**	**Possessor**
GAP	$<$————————————————			
PRONOUN				(———)

Why then do some speakers apparently allow the pronominal strategy when relativising on possessors? We suggest that this is not a case of a true resumptive pronoun strategy, but rather a last resort mechanism whereby speakers attempt to save ungrammatical extractions by inserting a pronoun. We find similar cases in English. Compare the two following sentences:

(25) *He's a guy that you really shouldn't ask whether anyone knows

(26) ? He's a guy that you really shouldn't ask whether anyone knows him.

Insertion of the pronoun improves the acceptability of the sentence, presumably because it makes it easier to identify the site of the relativisation operation in this complex structure.[4]

5.2 Preposition Fronting

We now turn to a different way of creating relatives into prepositional phrases; this was an area where dialectal variation comes to the fore. Recall that Skye and Uist speakers in general accepted the following kind of structure:

(27) an duine a bha thu ag èisteachd ris
     the man *a* were you at listening   to-3SM
     'The man you were listening to'

These speakers also accepted cases where the preposition is fronted and appears in its definite form (that is, the form it would take if it were to precede a definite noun phrase):

(28) an duine ris   an robh   thu ag èisteachd
     the man to-[DEF] that be-PAST you at listening
     'The man you were listening to.'

However, (27) was ruled out by all of our Lewis speakers. Here, then, we have a straightforward dialect split, with Skye and Uist speakers showing individual variability for these constructions while Lewis speakers accept only the latter.

Interestingly, when we look at the patterns of variability in more fine-grained detail, we see that there are grammatical constraints on the individual and dialectal variation.

5.2.1 Preposition that 'goes with' a particular verb

Certain prepositional phrases have a close syntactic and semantic connection to the verb they co-occur with. For example, the verb *èisd* requires a prepositional phrase rather than a simple object and (with some dialectal variation) that preposition must be *ri* or *le*. With such 'selected' prepositional phrases, we find the pattern just mentioned and summarized here (the notation *L means unacceptable for Lewis speakers, the notation √L means acceptable for Lewis speakers and the notation %L means that there is variability. Mutatis mutandis for S(kye) speakers and U(ist) speakers):

(29) *L;√U, S an duine a bha   thu ag èisteachd ris
              the man *a* be-PAST you at listening   to-3SM
     'The man you were listening to'

(30) L;√U, %S an duine ris   an robh   thu ag èisteachd
              the man to-[DEF] that be-PAST you at listening
     'The man you were listening to'

This is the first major dialectal split. Lewis speakers reject the strategy where the prepositional phrase is left at the end of the sentence ('stranded'), whereas Uist and Skye speakers find this strategy acceptable. Uist speakers find both structures perfectly fine, while Skye speakers prefer the stranding strategy to the fronting one (that is, all Skye speakers accepted 29 while only some accepted 30).

5.2.2 Negative Sentences

We find more or less the same pattern with negative versions of these sentences, showing that negation does not seem to affect this construction (whereas it does impact on extraction in other languages; see, for example, Rizzi, 1990).

(31) *L;√ U, S an duine nach robh thu   ag èisteachd ris
              the man not that be-PAST you at listening   to-3SM
     'the man you weren't listening to'

(32) L;√U, S an duine ris nach robh thu   ag èisteachd
              the man to not that be-PAST you at listening
     'the man you weren't listening to'

9

5.2.3 Prepositions that go with the verb 'to be'

If we look at prepositions which occur as complements to the verb *be* and which function not as verbal arguments but rather as phrases which predicate some property of a subject, the patterns of variation change:

(33) *L;%U;√ S am bòrd a bha   an leabhar fodha
                the table *a* be-PAST the book   under-3SM
    'the table the book was under'

(34) *S;%U;√ L am bòrd fon   a bheil   an leabhar
                the table under that be-PRESENT the book
    'the table the book is under'

For Lewis speakers, once again the fronting construction is well-formed and the stranding construction is unacceptable. For Skye speakers, the stranding construction is well formed, but, rather than having variability, 34 was judged to be unacceptable (for 6 out of 7 speakers). This is in marked contrast to these same speakers' judgments of the fronting strategy with selected prepositional complements, where 6 out of 7 speakers accepted it.[5] Uist speakers showed no clear effect here, and gave variable judgments for both.

5.2.4 Prepositional phrases that can be freely added to any verb

Prepositional phrases can also act as modifiers of verb phrases. For example, a locative phrase like 'under the tree' can be added to almost any verb regardless of the verb's selectional needs. Such prepositional phrases are traditionally termed 'adjunct PPs'. When we examine the behaviour of these, we find that they pattern just like predicative PPs, and that they contrast with argument PPs:

(35) *L;%U;√ S a' chraobh a dh'òl   thu an leann fodha
                the tree   *a* drink-PAST you the beer under-3SM
    'the tree you drank the beer under'

(36) *S;%U;√ L a' chraobh fon   an do dh'òl   thu an leann
                the tree   under that drink-PAST you the beer
    'the tree you drank the beer under'

Overall then, it seems that for those dialects which allow the stranding strategy, the semantic relation of the prepositional phrase to the selecting verb may impact on the acceptability of the fronting strategy.

5.2.5 Long Distance Relatives

The final case we will look at involves constructions where the domain noun of the relative and the position of the gap are separated by an extra clause boundary. This case is especially interesting in Gaelic, since the language specially marks complementizers of embedded clauses which intervene between a domain noun and a gap.

The usual embedding complementizer in Gaelic is *gu(n)*:

(37) Thuirt   an duine gum buail   e mi
     say-PAST the man *a*   strike-FUT he I
     'The man said he will hit me'

However, if we create a relative clause structure which spans this embedded clause, we find
that the complementizer appears as *a*, rather than *gu(n)*

(38) An duine a thuirt   thu a bhuaileas tu
     The man *a* say-PAST you *a* strike-REL you
     'The man that you said you will hit'

(39) *An duine a thuirt   thu gum buail   thu
     The man   *a* say-PAST you that strike-FUT you
     'The man that you said he will hit'

This now raises the question of which complementizer we will find in cases of PP fronting.
We concentrate here on the selected PP examples since only these were found to be acceptable
to (almost) all speakers.
    We found that Skye and Uist speakers generally prefer to strand the preposition, as in the
simple cases.

(40) $\sqrt{}$ S; $\sqrt{}$U; % L an duine a thuirt   thu a bha   thu ag èisteachd ris
                      the man *a* said-PAST you *a* be-PAST you at listening   to-3SM
     'the man you said you were listening to'

Even Lewis speakers who disprefer preposition stranding also marginally allowed (40)
above. The long distance cases with preposition fronting seem to have no universally accepted
variant:

(41) %S; %U; $\sqrt{}$ L an duine ris an duirt   thu gun robh   thu ag èisteachd
                      the man with say-PAST you that be-PAST you at listening
     'the man you said you were listening to'

(42) %S; %U; % L an duine ris an duirt   thu a bha   thu ag èisteachd
                      the man with say-PAST you *a* be-PAST/ you at listening
     'the man you said you were listening to'

6   Conclusion

Overall, we found that there was clear evidence that Gaelic relative structures work in a way
which is related to but yet distinct from the syntax of relativization in Irish. Moreover, we
found evidence for dialectal level variation in Gaelic prepositional relatives. Some speakers
(Uist) accepted both fronting and stranding strategies, showing individual level variation (and
in fact, looking at particular speakers, some expressed no preference for one structure or an-
other, showing variation in their individual I-languages). This variation seems to be reduced to
the point of non-existence in Lewis in favour of a fronting strategy, whereas in Skye it exists
but the stranding strategy is preferred. There is also evidence that the underlying grammar of

prepositional relatives in Lewis and Skye is different, with grammatical factors such as selection and embedding impacting in different ways on the acceptability of the structures.

More generally, we hope to have shown that syntactic dialectal variation in Scottish Gaelic is an important feature of the language. There is a long tradition in the literature of detailed linguistic studies of both phonological and lexical variation within Scottish Gaelic (see, e.g. Borgstrom, 1937; 1940; 1941; Oftedal, 1956; Holmer, 1957; Ó Murchú, 1989 among many others), but stable syntactic variation has gone largely unstudied. We suspect that this might be due to a perception that certain syntactic choices are more 'correct' than others, and that variation in this domain is not a natural or native feature of the region. We hope that our study has shown that this variation is real among native speakers and we have suggested that it is inherent to any natural language system. We believe that the study of internal syntactic variation within the dialects of Scottish Gaelic is an important research area, and should take its place alongside the detailed work on phonological and lexical differences that we find across the Gàidhealtachd.

References

Adger, David. 1996. Agreement, aspect and measure phrases in Scottish Gaelic. In Robert Borsley and Ian Roberts, eds., *The Syntax of the Celtic Languages*, 200–222, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Adger, David. 2005. Combinatorial variation, ms. Queen Mary, University of London.

Adger, David and Ramchand, Gillian. 2002. Phases and interpretability. In K. Megerdoomain and L.A Bar-el, eds., *Proceedings of the West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics (WCCFL) 20*, 1–14, Somerville, MA.: Cascadilla Press.

Adger, David and Ramchand, Gillian. 2005. Move and Merge: *Wh*-dependencies revisited. *Linguistic Inquiry* 36:161–194.

Adger, David and Smith, Jennifer. 2005. Variation and the Minimalist Program. In Leonie Cornips and Karen Corrigan, eds., *Syntax and Variation: Reconciling the Biological and the Social*, 149–178, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Borgstrøm, Carl. 1937. The dialects of Barra in the Outer Hebrides. *Norsk Tidsskrift For Sprogvidenskap* 8:71–242.

Borgstrøm, Carl. 1940. *The Dialects of the Outer Hebrides*. Norsk Tidsskrift For Sprogvidenskap. Suppl. Bind 1, Oslo: Norwegian Universities Press.

Borgstrøm, Carl. 1941. *The Dialects of Skye and Ross-shire*. Norsk Tidsskrift For Sprogvidenskap. Suppl. Bind 2, Oslo: Norwegian Universities Press.

Borsley, Robert. 1990. A GPSG approach to Breton word order. In Randall Hendrick, ed., *The syntax of the modern Celtic languages*, Syntax and semantics 23, 81–95, San Diego: Academic Press.

Chambers, Jack and Trudgill, Peter. 1980. *Dialectology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chomsky, Noam. 1986. *Knowledge of Language*. New York: Praeger Publications.

Gillies, William. 1993. Scottish Gaelic. In Martin J. Ball and James Fife, eds., *The Celtic Langages*, 145–227, New York: Routledge.

Henry, Alison. 1995. *Belfast English and Standard English: Dialect Variation and Parameter Setting*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Holmer, Nils. 1957. *The Gaelic of Arran*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Keenan, Edward and Comrie, Bernard. 1977. NP accessibility and universal grammar. *Linguistic Inquiry* 8:63–100.

Keenan, Edward L. 1985. Relative clauses. In Timothy Shopen, ed., *Language Typology and Syntactic Description*, 141–170, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kroch, Anthony. 1994. Morphosyntactic variation. In K. Beals et. al., ed., *Papers from the 30th Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistics Society*, Chicago Lingistics Society.

Labov, William. 1972. *Language in the Inner City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Labov, William. 1994. *Principles of Linguistic Change. Volume 1: Internal Factors*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Labov, William. 2000. *Principles of Linguistic Change. Volume II: Social Factors*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Lamb, William. 2002. Speech and writing in Scottish Gaelic: A study of register variation in an endangered language. Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh.

McCloskey, James. 1979. *Transformational Grammar and Model Theoretic Semantics*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer.

McCloskey, James. 1983. A VP in a VSO language? In Gerald Gazdar, Ewan Klein, and Geoff Pullum, eds., *Order Concord and Constituency*, 9–55, Dordrecht: Foris.

McCloskey, James. 1985. The Modern Irish double relative and syntactic binding. *Ériu* 36:46–84.

McCloskey, James. 1990. Resumptive pronouns, A-bar binding and levels of representation in Irish. In Randal Hendrick, ed., *The Syntax of the Modern Celtic Languages: Syntax and Semantics 23*, New York: Academic Press.

McCloskey, James. 1991. Clause structure, ellipsis and proper government in Irish. *Lingua* 85:259–302.

McCloskey, James. 1996. On the scope of verb movement in Irish. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 14:47–104.

Ó Baoill, Colm. 2000. The Gaelic continuum. *Éigse* 32:121–134.

Ó Curnáin, Brain. to appear. *Aspects of the Irish of Iorras Aithneach, Co. Galway*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Oftedal, Magne. 1956. *The Gaelic oof Leurbost,Isle of Lewis*. Norsk Tidsskrift For Sprogvidenskap. Suppl. Bind 3, Oslo: H. Aschehoug and Co.

Ó Murchú, Máirtín. 1989. *East Perthshire Gaelic*. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Ramchand, Gillian. 1997. *Aspect and Predication:The Semantics of Argument Structure*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rizzi, Luigi. 1990. *Relativized Minimality*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Sproat, Richard. 1985. Welsh syntax and VSO structure. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 3:173–216.

Wilson, John and Henry, Alison. 1998. Parameter setting within a socially realistic linguistics. *Language in Society* 27:1–21.

[2]In fact, this only applies to the highest subject position; *aN* is possible when the relativized position is an embedded subject. We ignore this here. See McCloskey (1990) for extensive discussion.

[3]This strategy is clearly available in a more literary register, which makes the rejection of such examples all the more interesting.

[4]This may also be the basis of an account of the data noted by Gillies, (1993), and mentioned above, where we find full agreement on a prepositional object that has been relativised. More work here is clearly necessary.

[5]The dissenting speaker in each case was, however, different. Skye speakers also rejected the more formal variant of this example, with *fo'm bheil* suggesting they were not just rejecting the construction as a dialectal variant. Thanks to William Gillies for pointing out this possibility.