

## Microvariation in Celtic Relatives

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**1. Introduction:** The syntactic effects of relativisation in Welsh, Irish and Scottish Gaelic vary in a complex and potentially baffling way between the languages and across their dialects. The crucial components of this variation are resumptivity, “wh-agreeing” complementizers, a differential treatment of locality domains, and variation in the availability of pied-piping. In this paper we argue that the complexity reduces to two factors: (i) the featural composition of C and (ii) the presence of an EPP feature in C which is sensitive only to phonological content. We first address the variation across these three languages, and then focus on variation in the availability of pied-piping in three dialects of Scottish Gaelic.

**2. Interlanguage variation:** Scottish Gaelic (SG) and Modern Irish (MI) are closely related, with Welsh (W) being a more distant relation. However, both MI and W allow resumptive dependencies, while SG does not (McCloskey 1990, Rouveret 2001); SG and MI allow “chains” of complementizers in long distance wh-constructions, in contrast to Welsh (Adger and Ramchand 2001); SG and MI differ in the domains into which these relative dependencies can reach, SG allowing relativisation into PP in contrast to MI; finally, MI allows matrix resumptive dependencies, but W does not (Harlow 1981). We develop a theory of relativisation for Celtic which accounts for this inter-language variation by exploiting just three syntactic features: [ $\Lambda$ ], which correlates with the semantic interpretation of a CP as a predicate; [Var], a feature which marks the foot of the relative dependency; and [Ccase], a feature which is related to case on DPs and implicated in the interpretation of CP as an argument. Crucially, none of these strategies makes use of movement to a specifier of C, so relative dependencies are always *in situ* dependencies constructed via Agree and not Move (but see section 3).

We show that *in situ* dependencies are constructed in these languages by  $\Lambda$ -bearing Cs Agreeing with pronominals lexically specified as [ $u\Lambda$ ]. [Var] and  $\phi$  are in complementary distribution on [ $u\Lambda$ ] pronominals so that a dependency triggered by C[ $\Lambda$ ] terminates in a  $\phi$ -featured (‘resumptive’) pronoun while one triggered by C[Var,  $u\Lambda$ ] terminates in a non-agreeing *pro*. This accounts for the anti-agreement effect in Celtic relativisation (McCloskey 1990). The presence of Ccase determines whether the CP is an argument, and thereby incompatible with predicative status. Thus, if a C bears both Ccase and  $\Lambda$ ,  $\Lambda$  must be uninterpretable, leading to a chaining of complementizers which will allow long distance dependencies. In addition, if  $u$ Var is instantiated on C, then  $\Lambda$  must also be, or else Var cannot be checked and deleted. Given these basic logical cooccurrence restrictions, the assumption that these three features are freely instantiable on C gives us a typology of possible Cs, represented in the first column of the following table:

C	Language	Phonological Form	Effect
[Ccase]	Welsh/Irish/Gaelic	y/gun	embedding C
[Ccase, $u\Lambda$ ]	Welsh/Irish	y/gun	embedding C allowing resumptives
[Ccase, $u$ Var, $u\Lambda$ ]	Irish/Gaelic	a	embedding C allowing relatives
[ $u$ Var, $\Lambda$ ]	Welsh	a	matrix C allowing relatives
[ $\Lambda$ ]	Welsh/Irish	y/aN	matrix C allowing resumptives

The different patterns of relativisation follow straightforwardly from this minimal system of features, depending only on which complementizers are available in which language (columns 2 and 4 in the table above).

**3. Dialectal Variation:** With this analysis in place, we focus on a distinct strategy for relativisation found almost exclusively in SG which involves beside the Agree strategy in (1), apparent pied piping of prepositions, and the utilization of a special complementizer *an* (2).

(1) **Strategy 1: Rel. Comp + Preposition Stranding**

an duine a bha thu ag eisdeachd ris  
the man C were you asp listen to  
'The man you were listening to'

(2) **Strategy 2: 'Pied-Piped' Preposition + Complementizer**

an duine ris an robh thu ag eisdeachd  
the man to-[DEF] C were you asp listen  
'The man you were listening to.'

New data from three dialects of SG (Lewis (L), Uist (U) and Skye (S)) shows that there is considerable variation in the availability of Strategy 2. While Strategy 2 is available in all three dialects for argument PPs, it is unavailable in S for predicative/adjunct PPs. On the other hand, in L, Strategy 2 is available for all PPs, but Strategy 1 is rejected in the case of adjunct PPs. U shows apparent idiolectal or free variation.

(3)(\*S;√L) am bòrd fon a bheil an leabhar (4)(\*L;√S) am bòrd a bha an leabhar fodha  
the table under C was the book the table C was the book under  
'The table that the book was under' 'The table that the book was under.'

A similar pattern of variation is found when the relative is negative: Strategy 1 is impossible in L, and good elsewhere, with some variation in U. Once again, the converse is also true: Strategy 2 is dispreferred in S and U where it is variable, while in L it is well formed. In L, strategy 2 is also available long distance, an option completely disallowed in S.

We first show that, despite initial appearances, in S the well-formed cases of Strategy 2 are not pied-piping at all. Rather, they involve base-adjunction of P to C, which is then related to the foot of the dependency via a mechanism of argument agreement. We motivate this analysis on the basis of facts to do with lexical restrictions on strategy 2, and its unavailability long-distance in S. The argument agreement mechanism also correctly rules out Strategy 2 for adjunct Ps. Strategy 2 in S can then be successfully assimilated to the analysis presented in section 2.

In L, on the other hand, we argue that a true pied-piping operation is also available. Pied-piping is to be understood here as a process that moves a [Var] category to the specifier of C just in case that category contains phonological material. In L, but not in S, the PP containing a *pro*[Var] complement may be moved to a specifier position, satisfying a phonological EPP requirement. This is why adjunct P pied-piping is well-formed in L, and it explains why L speakers accept long distance versions of strategy 2. Similarly, speakers of L analyse negative relatives as involving true pied-piping, an option which is not available for speakers of S, who cannot base adjoin P to a negative C. We show that the variability of judgements for speakers of U means that they use both systems. In fact, close attention to the judgements of these speakers show that they adopt one system or the other, or both, but never a mixed strategy.

**4. Conclusion** We have shown that the divergent but closely related systems of relativisation in three Celtic languages can be reduced to selection of Cs by the language, where certain possible Cs are ruled out by universal constraints on feature combinations. Concerning the microvariation found within the SG dialects, we argued that a superficially similar looking strategy had radically different underlying analyses in the different dialects, although these different analyses in turn reduce to the presence/absence of a phonological EPP feature on C. These different analyses converge in generating the most common instances of the construction (plausibly a precondition for such distinct analyses existing in such closely related dialects), but gave strikingly different grammatical possibilities when extended to a wider range of sentence types. Crucially, speakers of the intermediate dialect allowed use of both systems, but not of a mixed system, backing up the feature-based approach to micro-linguistic variation.

## References

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