# Prepositions in Modern Irish: Agreement and Impoverishment

Modern Irish shows a similar pattern of agreement on verbs, nouns, and prepositions (McCloskey & Hale, 1984; Legate, 1999). Little attention has been paid, however, to those aspects of agreement unique to prepositions. This paper offers an account of the the environment that conditions the distribution of prepositional inflection, arguing for the influence of both bottom-up and top-down morphological processes (contra Legate, 1999), and details the representation of exponents that realize agreement.

Prepositions have both uninflected and inflected forms (1). Inflected forms must be used if possible, and cannot be replaced with an uninflected preposition and a pronoun (2), nor can an inflected preposition co-occur with an overt pronominal argument (3) . Gaps in verbal inflection show that if an inflected form is not available to realize agreement features, an uninflected form surfaces along with the appropriate pronoun (4). Legate (1999), following McCloskey and Hale (1984), accounts for this distribution by arguing that a pronoun is obligatorily null when agreement features are realized by overt inflection. Arguments for the presence of a null pronoun include the availability of pronoun-modifiers such as reflexive particles, and the possibility of conjoining an inflected preposition with a lexical argument (5). Within Distributed Morphology, Legate proposes a null pronominal allomorph which is spelled out if and only if the pronoun appears in an environment with matching $\phi$-features. Crucially, this proposal relies on the top-down application of post-syntactic vocabulary insertion (VI).

Inflected prepositions also cannot co-occur with an overt lexical argument (6a), but instead the uninflected base form must be spelled out (6b). Unlike the relationship between inflection and pronouns, it is the lexical argument which predicts the appearance of inflection, and not the other way around. Crucially, gaps in the third person of the verbal paradigm mask the effects of this bottom-up conditioning, which becomes apparent only with regards to prepositional paradigms. I account for these effects by arguing that $\phi$-features on a prepositional head are deleted in the context of a lexical DP by a rule of morphological impoverishment (Bonet, 1991), schematized in (7). The dissociation between top-down VI and bottom-up impoverishment supports a model in which select morphological operations take place cyclically prior to vocabulary insertion (contra Trommer, 1999).

Turning to the morphological realization of agreement, inflected prepositions represent the spell-out of the base preposition and an inflectional affix. While this is straightforward for the predictable endings of most forms, there is no discernible affix across prepositions in the 3rd person singular masculine (1). Notably, 3.sg.m represents the most unmarked set of agreement features (Acquaviva, 1999). Acquaviva proposes that there are two underlying forms for each preposition, however, noting that the stem remains predictable (even in 3.sg.m), and that inflectional allomorphy in the unmarked case is significantly more common cross-linguistically (e.g., Latin nominative singular nouns (8)) than root suppletion, I propose that Irish exhibits affix allomorphy when realizing unmarked agreement.

Finally, the paper explores some limitations of the present account, noting the intuition that that the distribution of Irish agreement reflects the single principle that $\phi$-features be spelled out only once. A possible formulation within the present framework is that the morphological operations are reflexes of an economy condition on morphological spell-out akin to restrictions on spelling out multiple copies of a movement chain.

(1)

| | *le* 'with' | *ag* 'at' | *ar* 'on' | *faoi* 'under' | *thri* 'through' |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| base | le | ag | ar | faoi | thri |
| 1.sg | liom | agam | orm | fum | thrim |
| 2.sg | leat | agat | ort | fut | thrit |
| **3.sg (m)** | **leis** | **aige** | **air** | **faoi** | **thrid** |
| 3.sg (f) | lei | aice | uirthi | fuithi | thrithi |
| 1.pl | linn | againn | orainn | fuinn | thrinn |
| 2.pl | libh | agaibh | oraibh | fuibh | thribh |
| 3.pl | leo | acu | orthu | futhu | thriothu |

(2) a.  Bhí mé ag  caint **leofa**    inné.
        was I    talk PROG with.3pl yesterday

 b.  \*Bhí mé ag  caint **le**    **siad** inné.
        was I    talk PROG with them yesterday

(3)  \*Bhí mé ag  caint **leofa**    **siad** inné.
     was I    talk PROG with.3pl them yesterday

     'I was talking to them yesterday.'

(4)  **Chuirfeadh se** isteach ar an   phost sin.
     put.COND    he in        on that job

     'He would apply for that job.'

(5)  Tá        teach **agam féin  agus Eoghain**.
     Be.PRES house at.1sg REFL and   Owen

     'Owen and I have a house.'

(6) a.  \*Bhí mé ag  caint **lei**       **Máire** inné.
        was I    talk PROG with.3sg-f Mary     yesterday

        'I was talking to Mary yesterday.'

 b.  Bhí mé ag  caint **le**   **Máire** inné.
        was I    talk PROG with Mary    yesterday

        'I was talking to Mary yesterday.'

(7)  $\mathrm{X}^0_{\phi[pers,num,gen]} \rightarrow \mathrm{X}^0_{\phi[\varnothing]}$ / _____ $\mathrm{DP}_{lex}$

(8)

| *Latin nouns* | **nom**. | gen. | dat. | acc. | abl. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 'man' (sg.) | **homo** | hominis | homini | hominem | homine |
| 'soldier' (sg.) | **miles** | militis | militi | militem | milite |

## Selected References

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