1 Introduction

- Scottish Gaelic is like other Celtic languages in having a verbal noun, aspectual particles which are historically related to prepositions, and in marking objects of the verbal noun with genitive case.
- These three characteristics come together in Scottish Gaelic to provide a unique perspective on two observations in the typological literature:
  i. Locative constructions, with nominalized verbs, tend to express progressive aspect (Bybee et al. 1994)
  ii. Imperfective and progressive aspects tend to have an effect on the marking of nouns (Dixon 1994)
- Outline for talk: I first turn to locative constructions and nominalized verbs, then move on to the effects of aspect on marking of nouns, and then conclude

2 Locative Constructions and Progressive

- Aspect is expressed periphrastically, using aspectual particles and the verbal noun\(^1\) (Reed 2012, Cox 1996)

\[(1)\]

a. **PERFECT**

Tha mi **air** na litichean a **sgrìobhadh**

be.PRES I PERF the.PL letter.PL write.VN

‘I have written the letters’

b. **RESTRICTED PERFECT**

Tha mi **as dèidh** na litichean a **sgrìobhadh**

be.PRES I R.PERF the.PL letter.PL write.VN

‘I have just written the letters’

c. **PROSPECTIVE**

Tha mi **a’dol** a **sgrìobhadh** na litichean

be.PRES I PROS write.VN the.PL letter.PL

‘I am going to write the letters’

d. **RESTRICTED PROSPECTIVE**

Tha mi **gu** na litichean a **sgrìobhadh**

be.PRES I R.PROS write.VN the.PL letter.PL

(2) **PROGRESSIVE**

Tha mi **a’ sgrìobhadh** na litichean

be.PRES I IMPF write.VN the.PL letter.PL

‘I am writing the letters’ (Reed 2012: 34)

- These aspectual particles have corresponding prepositions with locative meanings (Reed 2012: 34)

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<tr>
<th>ASPECT</th>
<th>PREPOSITION</th>
<th>TRANSLATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PERFECT</td>
<td>air</td>
<td>‘on’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESTRICTED PERFECT</td>
<td>as dèidh</td>
<td>‘after’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESTRICTED PROSPECTIVE</td>
<td>gu</td>
<td>‘towards’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROGRESSIVE</td>
<td>a’/ag</td>
<td>‘at’</td>
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</table>

- These aspectual constructions are plausibly considered to be based on locative constructions
- The prospective, built on a’ dol a, a verbal predicate, also requires a post-verbal object in the genitive case. Because this aspect is not formed via prepositional particles, and, as Reed (2012: 168) points out, a’ dol is itself at least syntactically a progressive, I won’t address this aspect in this paper.

2.1 Cross-Linguistic Tendency in the Expression of Progressive

- Scottish Gaelic fits with the observation made by Bybee et al. (1994: 130) and Laka (2006: 174) that progressives tend to be based on locative constructions

\(^1\) Reed (2012: 20) notes that the progressive seems to be imperfective with eventive verbs only, and so I will conflate these two concepts in this paper
• Additionally, progressive constructions tend to retain their locative syntax even after the aspectual preposition or verb is grammaticalized (Bybee et al. 1994)

• And this can explain why main verbs in progressive constructions tend to be nominal (Bybee et al. 1994: 131)

2.2 Implications from Gaelic

• In Scottish Gaelic, aspectual constructions parallel prepositional locative constructions and use the verbal noun

• In all prepositional aspect constructions, pronominal objects occur in the possessive form

(3) bhiodh iad air an tilgeil a-mach air an doras
     be.COND they PERF 3PL.POSS throw.VN out on the door
     ‘They would have been thrown out the door.’

Litir do Lughd-Ionnsachaidh ²

• The progressive behaves differently, in that it marks the full nominal object in the genitive case and has a different word order

(4) BI subject ASPECT
     VN  object(Gen)  (Progressive)
     object  a VN      (Non-progressive)

2.3 Upshot

• The progressive verbal noun is arguably more nominal, although most aspects are expressed with locative constructions

• Scottish Gaelic provides another perspective on Bybee et al.’s generalization that progressives are formed on locative constructions and in fact it seems that

• This cross-linguistic tendency is so strong, that while non-progressive aspects have developed a more verbal syntax and morphology (cf. Lash 2010), the progressive has resisted this development.

• The progressive is not only more likely to be expressed with locative constructions and nominalized verbs, but also strongly maintains the nominal status of the verb, and, presumably, its locative status

• These facts converge to support the idea that there is a cognitive-semantic underpinning to the use of a locative construction, and a nominalized verb in particular, in the progressive (Bybee et al. 1994)

3 Aspect and Object Marking

• The different marking of objects in the progressive that we saw above is reminiscent of directional tendencies in the effect of aspect on the marking of subjects and objects (“alignment splits”)

• ALIGNMENT: the pattern of marking case on nouns

  – NOMINATIVE-ACCUSATIVE alignment \[ A, S \] O
  – ERGATIVE-ABSOLUTIVE alignment \[ S, O \]

• SPLITS: a change in the alignment pattern of a language, which can be governed by aspect

• Dixon (1994): in a language with an alignment split based on aspect, the perfective aspect will always retain an ergative pattern

(5) Perfective << Imperfective << Progressive
    Ergative        << Accusative

²Letter to Learners, available online at bbc.co.uk/foghlam
• In Scottish Gaelic the perfective is indicated by the analytic verb form Reed (2012: 20)

(6)  
PERFECTIVE
Sgiobh mi na litricean
write.PAST I the.PL letter.PL
‘I wrote the letters.’

Reed [2012, 33]

(7)  
PROGRESSIVE
agus bheir mise dhith asal a bhios aice a’ tarruing na mònach
and give LEMPH to.3SG donkey which be.FUT at.3FSG IMPF carry.VN the.GEN peat.GEN
‘and I will give her a donkey that will carry the peat for her.’ Oftedal (1956: 267)

• Although there is no change in alignment pattern overall, I believe this fact of Scottish Gaelic (and Irish) can bear on the phenomenon of aspect-based alignment splits

• And this parallel will support recent analyses of alignment splits based on locative constructions

• Drawing on Bybee et al.’s observation that progressives tend to be locative, Coon (2010) assumes non-perfective aspects tend to be locative, and therefore more structurally complex

• And this complex structures correlates with a difference in marking of nouns (Coon 2010: 177)

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• Ergative languages that use locative constructions with nominalized verbs show this more clearly because nominalized verbs tend to mark subjects of both intransitive and transitive verbs with genitive case (Coon 2010), giving a nominative-accusative alignment

• Coon claims that this complexity in the progressive or imperfective aspect is in fact universal

• Scottish Gaelic provides evidence of an unambiguously nominative-accusative language that shows complexity in the progressive

3.1 Implications for an Analysis of the Verbal Noun in Scottish Gaelic

• The perfect and the progressive look identical outside of when a full nominal object is present

(9)  
a.  
gun robh Roddy air a iompachadh
that be.PAST R. PERF 3MSG convert.VN
‘that Roddy had converted himself’

Oftedal (1956: 265)

b.  
Cha robh mi ga chreidsinn
NEG be.PAST I IMPF.3MSG believe.VN
‘I didn’t believe him’

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• But if Coon is right, the progressive in fact has a different structure

• If Scottish Gaelic can be analyzed as having something of an aspect-based split, and if Coon’s claim of universal complexity in all progressives is true, then it would follow that the progressive in Scottish Gaelic is more complex than we might expect based on the surface form

• This would be rather surprising, because there seems to be no independent evidence for a more complex structure for the verbal noun in the progressive aspect
• However, it seems we might have a natural parallel structure in complex prepositions: a locative structure with more complexity than other prepositions

(10) os ciom a’ mhonaigh
    over the.GEN hill.GEN
    ‘over the hill’

(11) a’ tarrning na mònach
    ‘carrying the peat’

• The retention of nominal features on the verbal noun (i.e. genitive case on the object) is due to this parallel

3.2 Summary

• Scottish Gaelic provides indirect support that alignment splits are due to complex structure in the progressive
  – The effect of the Scottish Gaelic on Coon’s analysis of aspect and alignment is that although it is tempting to pin the effects of case on a locative construction, it is clear from the Scottish Gaelic facts that this cannot be the full story.
  – Because in a language that employs locative constructions for all non-perfective aspects there is still a split in the marking of objects, targeting the imperfective/progressive
  – There is something special about the progressive construction that makes the verbal noun retain more of its nominal characteristics and thus the differences in object marking
  – But Scottish Gaelic seems to support a stronger claim, that it is not just locative structure that gives rise to a difference in marking, but that it is the progressive and imperfective aspects specifically that are prone to this difference in marking, thus giving Dixon’s (1994) observation that these two aspects are the most likely to show splits

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4 The Verbal Noun and Genitive Objects

• The Celtic languages appear to historically have something like an ergative alignment in the verbal noun (cf. Tallerman and Wallenberg (2012) for Middle Welsh)

(13) a. a gwedy disgynnu Arthur yr tir
    and after descend.INF A. to.the land
    ‘and after Arthur landed’

b. a gwedy gwelet o Lud hynny
    and after see.INF of Lhudd that(N)
    ‘and when Lludd saw that(N)’

c. a ’e llywyaw o Lud hi
    and 3FS.GEN rule.INF of Lludd her
    ‘and Lludd ruled it’

Tallerman and Wallenberg (2012: 3)

• Infinitives in Old Irish also showed a similar pattern, with objects and intransitive subject appearing in the genitive case, and transitive subjects marked with do (Lewis and Pedersen 1937: 314)
(14)  a. comainad **ind huili rechto**
    fulfill.INF the.GEN whole law
    ‘to fulfill the whole law’

    b. forcommacair buith **a maicc som** hi Roim
    happened be.INF his son.GEN EMPH in Rome
    ‘it happened that his son was in Rome’

    c. airitiu colno **do christ**
    take.INF flesh to Christ
    ‘that Christ has taken flesh’

Lewis and Pedersen (1937: 314)

- Scottish Gaelic has inherited this particular seemingly regative characteristic of nominalized verbs, putting it in a unique position among nominative-accusative alignment systems to support Coon’s (2010) hypothesis that complex structures are universally involved in progressive or imperfective aspects.

- Scottish Gaelic demonstrates that there is something about the progressive/imperfective that is best expressed/most compatible with a nominalized verb, beyond a cross-linguistic preference for locative constructions in the progressive

- It is this split in alignment or case-marking of nominal vs. verbal domains that can give rise to aspect-based splits

- Scottish Gaelic inherited a different alignment in the nominalized verbs, which has resisted changing in the progressive construction

5 Conclusions

- Cross-linguistically, locative constructions are used to express aspectual relations, and especially so in the progressive
  - Nominalized verbs are common to see in these types of constructions
  - The progressive aspect in Scottish Gaelic has retained a more nominal verbal noun, in the retention of genitive objects
  - The progressive aspect itself appears to somehow promote the retention of nominal features/locative features
  - This tendency overrides apparent structural similarities across aspects

- Progressive aspect and the marking of objects
  - Scottish Gaelic reflects the cross-linguistic tendency for progressive to have a different case-marking pattern
  - Coon (2010) deriving this cross-linguistic tendency from locative constructions, predicts a complex structure for the imperfective/progressive for all languages
  - Scottish Gaelic provides support for this claim, and possibly a stronger one, that the progressive aspect has a strong tendency for retaining a locative structure and nominalized verbs
  - It seems that there must be some ergative alignment involved for evidence of this complex structure to come through, and this can come either from the verbal domain, or from the nominal domain (as in Scottish Gaelic)

- All aspectual constructions use a locative construction, but while other aspects have developed a more verbal syntax (cf. Lash [2010]), it is the progressive that has retained a more nominal syntax

- Scottish Gaelic mirrors the directional tendencies in aspect-based alignment splits, and this is transparently related to the historical status of the verbal noun
References


Maggie Tallerman and Joel Wallenberg. The Middle Welsh historic infinitive. *New Perspectives on Celtic Syntax,* University of California, Berkeley, September 7-8 2012 2012.