ON APPARENT ADJECTIVE FRONTING IN MODERN IRISH[*]

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Modern Irish Gaelic (Irish hereafter) has a peculiar case of "adjective fronting", which has not yet been investigated in details. Carnie (1995) outlines a possible account of the pattern, which resorts to fronting of the AP predicate and adjunction of a DP. The goal of this paper is to further empirical understanding of this construction by reviewing Carnie's analysis, and suggest that a correct account of the pattern should employ head-movement of the "fronted" adjective.

1.   Adjective fronting

In the Irish copular construction, the nominal predicate precedes the subject in a copular clause, as shown in (1).

(1)   a.   Is   [NomPred duine deas]   é.
              COP.PRES   person nice   him
              'He is a nice person.'

       b.   Is   [NomPred leabhar maith]   í   Finnegans Wake.
              COP.PRES   book   good   it
              'Finnegans Wake is a good book.'

The copular particle *is* appears at the clause initial position. The particle is highly functional, and it is located either in I/T (Doherty, 1996) or C (Carnie, 1995). Also the data in (1) show that the nominal predicate is phrasal, and attributive adjectives appear post-nominally in Irish.[1]

The sentences in (1) have marked counterparts, shown in (2).

(2)   a.   Is   **deas an duine**   é.
              COP.PRES nice   the person   him
              'He is a NICE person.'

[1] Except a few adjectives, such as *sean* 'old'.

b.   Is   **maith an leabhar** í Finnegans Wake.
         COP.PRES good   the book   it
         'Finnegans Wake is a GOOD book.'

In (2), the adjectives are *fronted*. The adjectives appear pre-nominally, immediately after the copular particle *is*. The rest of the nominal predicate comes with the definite article *an* 'the'. Except a few scattered remarks (e.g., Stenson (1981: §3.1.4.5 and §3.3.3), Ó Siadhail (1989), and Carnie (1995)), no detailed descriptions of the construction is available, and this construction is the very topic of this paper. I will use the term **Adjective Fronting Construction** (**AFC**) to refer to this particular construction. Note, however, that the terms "fronting" and/or "inversion" do not presuppose (at least at this point) that the construction is created by derivation of fronting or inversion.

       Before moving on to the next section, two notes are in order: First, the AFC gives emphasis to the adjective. In this paper, the emphasis is marked by capitalizing the adjective in translations, following Ó Siadhail (1989), and stay away from the semantics of it, as we focus on the syntax of the inversion.

       Secondly, the AFC is unique to the copula construction, and it is illicit with DPs (or NPs) in argument positions, as illustrated in (3).

(3)   a.   *Thug [Subj deas an fear] cuairt orainn.
          give   nice the man   visit   on.us
          'A NICE man visited.' (ok: *fear deas*)

      b.   *Cheannaigh mé   [Obj maith an leabhar].
          bought   I   good the book
          'I bought a GOOD book.' (ok: *leabhar maith*)

      c.   *Chas mé le   [PP-Obj deas an fear] ag an chóisir.
          met   I   with   nice the man   at the party
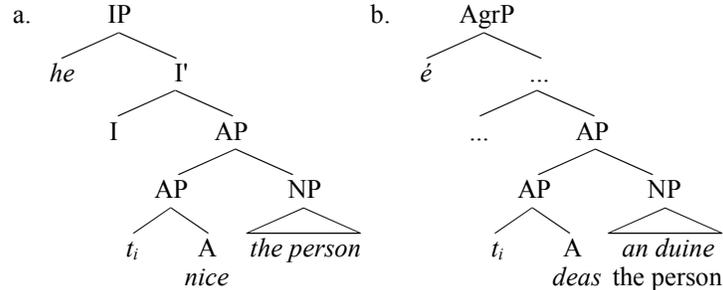   'I met a NICE man at the party.' (ok: *fear deas*)

       The next section provides a brief review of the analysis that Carnie suggests for the AFC. In section 3 we further our descriptive understanding of the construction by scrutinizing the analysis. In section 4, I suggest that the adjective inversion involves head-movement. Section 5 concludes.
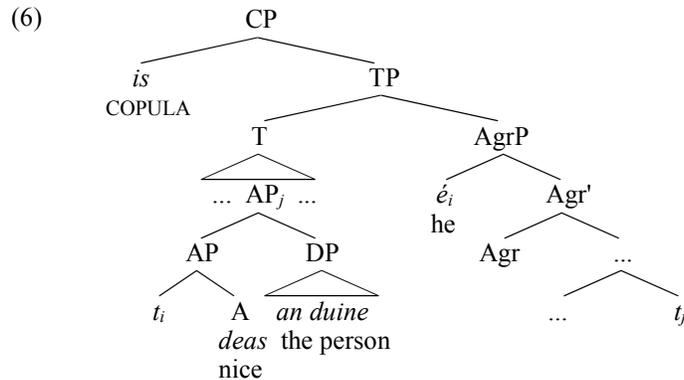
2.   Predicate fronting analysis (Carnie, 1995)

Carnie (1995: §6.5) proposes that the sentences in (2) should be interpreted as (4b), with the (simplified) structure in (5a).

(4)   *Is deas an duine é.*
      a.   'He is a NICE person.'
      b.   'He*i* is nice, the person*i*.'

(5)   from Carnie (1995: 209, (48))

   a.   IP   b.   AgrP
         he   I'   é   ...
              I   AP   ...   AP
                    AP   NP   AP   NP
                  t_i A   *the person* t_i A   *an duine*
                       nice   *deas* the person

The fronted adjective heads the predicate AP, and the DP[2] following the adjective is an adjunct that adjoins to the AP. Thus, the actual "subject" of the clause is the pronoun that follows the DP. Exploiting the main claim of Carnie (1995) that a phrasal element may undergo head-movement given the Bare Phrase Structure (Chomsky, 1995), he proposes that the AP undergoes head-movement to T in the adjective inversion construction, as in (6).

(6)   CP
              is   TP
           COPULA
                         T   AgrP
                    ... AP_j ... $é_i$ Agr'
                                      he
                  AP   DP   Agr   ...
                t_i A *an duine*   ... t_j
                     deas the person
                     nice

Leaving aside Carnie's main claim that a phrase may undergo movement, the analysis he proposes relies on two crucial assumptions. First, it is a "phrase" that fronts, and secondly, the DP that follows the inverted adjective is an adjunct. Let us call the analysis **Phrase Fronting Analysis (PFA).**

3.   Evidence against Carnie's analysis

The PFA makes several predictions about the adjective inversion construction. In this section, let us take a closer look at the PFA by considering those predictions. It will turn out that the PFA seems to be rather untenable.

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[2] For the sake of simplicity, I will assume that the string of a determiner and a noun following the inverted adjective to be a DP, simply due to the presence of the definite article *an* 'the'.

3.1 Native intuition

First, native speakers agree with the conventional translation, and they do not find (4b) to be an accurate English translation of the Irish AFC sentence in (2a). Stenson (1981:102) also notes that despite the presence of the definite article *an* with the post-adjective DP, the DP seems to have some indefinite flavour.

3.2. Use of first and second person pronoun

Now let us consider some of the predictions that we can make from the assumption that the DP following the inverted adjective is an adjunct. As sentences in (8) below illustrate, when the subject is either the first or second person pronoun, apposition turns out to be semantically awkward.

(8)   a.   #I_i am nice, the person$_i$.
         b.   #You$_j$ are nice, the girl$_j$.

If the post-adjective DP in the AFC is indeed an adjunct, we expect that the same result would obtain with the AFC. However, this prediction is not borne out. The adjective inversion is possible with a first or second person pronoun subject:

(9)   Is   deas an duine mé/thú.
        COP nice the person I/you
        'I am/You are a NICE person.'

3.3 Restriction on the DP

The assumption of DP adjunction makes another prediction. Adjuncts are not selected by the head of the phrase they adjoin to. This entails that an AP-adjunct can be either a proper name, a DP with a possessive pronoun, or a DP with a demonstrative, as exemplified by the English examples in (10):

(10)   a.   He's nice, *John*.   (Proper name)
        b.   She's nice, *my daughter*. (DP with possessive determiner)
        c.   She's nice, *that girl*.   (DP with demonstrative determiner)

However, a proper name or a possessed phrase cannot appear in the post-adjective DP position in the Irish AFC:

(11)   a.   *Is   deas **Séamus** é.
            COP nice Séamus him
            'He is nice, Séamus/Séamus is NICE.'

        b.   *Is   deas **Finnegans Wake** í/é.
            COP nice Finnegans Wake   it
            'It is nice, Finnegans Wake/Finnegans Wake is NICE.'

    c.   *Is álainn **An Earaigail** í/é.
          COP nice the Errigal   it
          'It is beautiful, Mt. Errigal./Mt. Errigal is BEAUTIFUL.'

(12) a.   *Is   maith **mo leabhar** í Finnegans Wake.
          COP good my book   it Finnegans Wake
          'Finnegans Wake is my GOOD book.'

      b.   *Is   maith **an leabhar sagam**   í Finnegans Wake.
          COP good the book   COP.at.me it Finnegans Wake
          'Finnegans Wake is my GOOD book/a GOOD book of mine.'

      c.   *Is   cliste **m'inion**   í   Bríd.
          COP clever my.daughter her Bríd
          'Bríd is my CLEVER daughter.'

(13) *Is   maith **an leabhar sin** í Finnegans Wake.
     COP clever the book   that it Finnegans Wake
     'Finnegans Wake is that GOOD book.'

The examples in (11) have a proper name in the DP slot. The examples in (12) have a DP with possessive marker, and in (13) the DP slot is occupied with a DP with demonstrative expression *sin*. These examples are found unequivocally unacceptable, suggesting that the assumption that the DP string is an adjunct.

3.4   Intersective vs. non-intersective adjectives

Let us now turn to the assumption that the fronted adjective heads a predicate AP.
     It is a well-known fact of English that the adjective *beautiful* is ambiguous (Larson, 1998):

(14) *the **beautiful** dancer*
     Meaning A (non-intersective): the dancer who dances beautiful (but is not necessarily beautiful himself/herself)
     Meaning B (intersective): the dancer whose appearance is beautiful (but does not necessarily dance beautifully)

This ambiguity is unique to the attributive use of the adjective, and the ambiguity disappears (or there is a strong disposition towards "the intersective reading" = Meaning B) when the adjective is used predicatively, as (15) below illustrates:

(15) *The dancer is **beautiful**.*
     ??/*Meaning A (non-intersective): the dancer who dances beautiful (but is not necessarily beautiful himself/herself)
     ✓Meaning B (intersective): the dancer whose appearance is beautiful (but does not necessarily dance beautifully)

Now let us consider Irish. The Irish adjective *álainn* 'beautiful' exhibits an ambiguity similar to its English counterpart when it is used attributively, and therefore the examples in (16) are ambiguous in the manner described in (14).

(16) a. an *damhsóir* **álainn**
         the dancer   beautiful
         'the beautiful dancer'

     b. Is *damhsóir* **álainn** í.
         COP dancer   beautiful her
         'She is a beautiful dancer.'

     c. Is *damhsóir* **álainn** (í) Áine.
         COP dancer   beautiful her Áine
         'Áine is a beautiful dancer.'

According to the PFA, the fronted adjective in the AFC heads the AP predicate, and thus it is expected that the adjective in the construction be unambiguous, with the B reading in (15). Nonetheless, the adjective remains ambiguous in the AFC.[3]

(17) a. Is **álainn**   an damhsóir í.
         COP beautiful   the dancer her
         'She is a BEAUTIFUL dancer' (ambiguous)

     b. Is **álainn**   an damhsóir (í) Áine.
         COP beautiful   the dancer her Áine
         'Áine is a BEAUTIFUL dancer.' (ambiguous)

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[3] Unlike in English, the predicative use of adjectives does not rule out ambiguity in Irish, as shown in (i) below. This may be attributed to the fact that *álainn* 'beautiful' belongs to the set of adjectives that require the adverbial marker *go* in the predicate position. Also, there seems to be a strong preference towards the intersective interpretation (= Meaning B).

i.   Tá an damhsóir go **hálainn**.
      Is the dancer   PRT beautiful
      'The dancer is beautiful.' (ambiguous)

      Also it should be noted that it is not clear whether the adjective is ambiguous when it is used in the copular construction for exclamative purposes, as in (ii) and (iii).

ii.   Is **álainn**   (í)   an damhsóir!
      COP beautiful her the dancer
      'The dancer is beautiful!'

iii. Nach **álainn**   (í)   an damhsóir!?
      COP.NEG.Q beautiful her the dancer
      'Isn't the dancer beautiful!?'

3.5. Pre-adjective intensifier

Let us consider another prediction that the AP predicate fronting makes with regard to pre-adjective intensifiers. Irish has a handful of pre-adjective intensifiers, including *an-* 'very' and *iontach* 'wonderful' shown in (18):

(18) a. Tá an leabhar go **han-mhaith**.
          is the book   PRT very-good
          'The book is very good.'

     b. Tá an leabhar **iontach**   maith.
          is the book   wonderful good
          'The book is very good.'

The examples in (18) come with the verb *bí* which corresponds to the English copula *be* which supports an AP predicate.[4] If the inverted adjective is an ordinary predicative adjective phrase as the PFA assumes, we should then expect intensifiers to be able to modify the adjective. However, the ungrammaticality of the examples in (19) shows this expectation is not borne out, suggesting that the fronted adjective does not constitute a phrase.

(19) a. *Is **an-mhaith** an leabhar í
          COP very-good the book   it
          'It is a VERY GOOD book.'

     b. *Is **iontach**   **m(h)aith** an leabhar í.
          COP wonderful good   the book   it
          'It is a VERY GOOD book.'

3.6 Ellipsis/response system

Lastly, let us consider the constituency of the structure derived with the PFA. In Irish, the head of the predicate of the question is repeated in order to express "yes" or "no".

(20) Q: An bhfuil tú tinn?
          Q be.PRES you   sick
          'Are you sick?'

     A: Tá/Níl.
          be.PRES/be.PRES.NEG
          'Yes/No.'

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[4] The verb *bí* and the copula particle *is* both roughly correspond with the English copula *be*, although *bí* is a verb and *is* is of a functional category above V. See Carnie (1995) and references therein for the discussions regarding this.

The response system is considered to be generated by the process of ellipsis, which targets an XP constituent (Doherty, 1996), as shown in (21):

(21)   Tá < [$_{XP}$ mé tinn] >

```
            YP
           /  \
          Y    XP
         Tá    / \
             mé  tinn
```
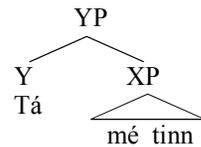
Crucially, the fronted adjective survives in the response system:

(22)   a.   A: Nach   maith an leabhar í !?
                 COP.NEG.Q good   the book   it
                 'Isn't it a GOOD book!?'

              B: Is   maith, cinnte!
                 COP good   certain
                 'Yes, indeed!'

        b.   A: Nach   scaltach an t-uisce é!?
                 COP.NEG.Q scalding the water it
                 'Isn't it SCALDING water!?'

              B: Is   maith, cinnte!
                 COP good   certain
                 'Yes, indeed!'

        c.   A: Nach   donn an mála é !?
                 COP.NEG.Q brown the bag   it
                 'Isn't it a BROWN bag!?'

              B: Is   donn, cinnte!
                 COP brown certain
                 'Yes, indeed!'

Under the structure derived by the PFA given in (6), the response system with a fronted adjective remains mysterious, since there is no constituent that targets the elided string.

3.7   Summary

We now have a better understanding of the AFC, as we revealed six descriptive properties of the AFC by scrutinizing the PFA proposed by Carnie (1995), and all of these properties seem to suggest that the PFA is not tenable. This is due to the two central assumptions that the PFA makes: i) that the post-adjective DP is an

adjunct, and ii) that the adjective is the head of the AP predicate and the whole predicate fronts. The following section sketches a more plausible alternative which exploits the notion of *head-movement* of the fronted adjective.

4.   Toward a head-movement analysis of the adjective inversion

The ellipsis/response system fact, repeated in (23), can be easily accounted for, if we assume that the inverted adjective has undergone head-movement as schematized in (24).

(23)   Is   maith < an leabhar í >, cinnte!
        COP   good   the book   it   certain
        'Yes, indeed!'

(24)
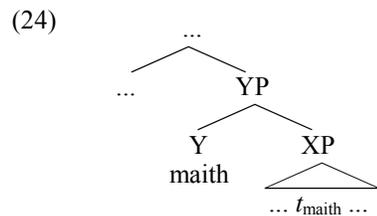
The head-movement approach seems to be also supported by the distribution of pre-adjective intensifiers. There are a handful of adjectives that appear with the copula particle *is* (with a rather distinct meaning). *Maith* 'good', as in (25a), is one such adjective, providing the meaning of 'to like'. These adjectives patterns with the inverted adjectives. These adjectives cannot take the pre-adjective intensifiers, as evidenced in (25b).

(25)   a.   Is   **maith** liom   an leabhar.
                COP   good   with.me the book
                'I like the book.'

        b.   *Is   **an-maith**   liom   an leabhar.
                 COP   very-good   with.me the book
                 'I like the book a lot.'

Very crucially, the adjectives in this case survive ellipsis, just as we find with the fronted adjectives (22):

(26)   a.   Nach   **maith** leat   an   chathaoir sin?
                COP.NEG.Q good   with.you the chair   that
                'Don't you like that chair?'

b. Ní **maith**.
COP.NEG good
'No (I don't).' (Ó Siadhail, 1989: 245(173))

This correlation between the fronted adjectives and the special adjectives that can co-occur with the copula particle *is* cannot be explained straightforwardly unless head-movement of the adjective is assumed.

Furthermore, focus-fronting (clefting) of the fronted adjectives triggers ungrammaticality, as evidenced in (27):
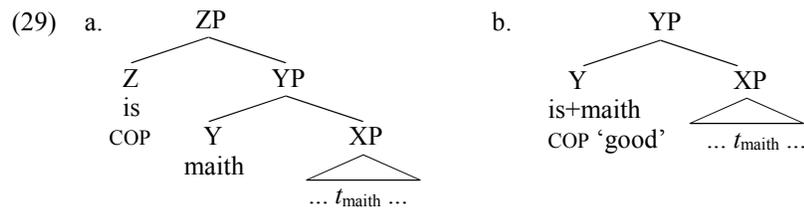
(27) a. Is **breá** an lá é.
COP fine the day it
'It is a FINE day.'

b. ***Breá** is ea an lá é.
fine COP *ea* the day it
'It is a FINE day.'

This contrasts to fronting of a nominal predicate, which is grammatical.

(28) a. Is **pub maith** é
COP pub good it
'It is a good pub.'

b. **Pub maith** is ea é
pub good COP *ea* it
A good pub, it is.' (Stenson, 1981:116(57))

This is simply a case of focus-driven movement targeting an XP-element. We can thus attribute the contrast to the claim that the nominal predicate is phrasal, whereas the inverted adjective is not.

Having established that the AFC is derived by head-movement of the fronted adjective, let us now consider the landing site of the adjective. Here, we can consider two possibilities, relative to the copula *is*. The first possibility is that the adjective moves to some functional category below the copula *is*, which is schematized in (29a). The tree in (29b) shows the second possibility where the adjective moves and head-adjoins to the copula.

(29) a.
```
            ZP
          /    \
         Z      YP
         is    /   \
        COP   Y     XP
             maith  /\
                   … t_maith …
```

b.
```
            YP
          /    \
         Y      XP
      is+maith  /\
    COP 'good'  … t_maith …
```

In the remaining part of this section I argue for the structure presented in (29b).

First, the distribution of the copula particle is in order. The non-past form of the copula particle *is* in the utterance initial position can be deleted when the predicate is a nominal XP, while the deletion is barred when an adjective is inverted:

(30)   a.   (Is) duine deas é.
           COP person nice him
           'He is a nice person.'

       b.   *(Is) deas an   duine é.
            COP   nice the person him
            'He is a NICE person.'

In the equative construction, the "pronominal augment" is found before the subject DP. When the copula is deleted, the augment must be deleted as well (Doherty, 1996; Ó Siadhail, 1989: §10.4).
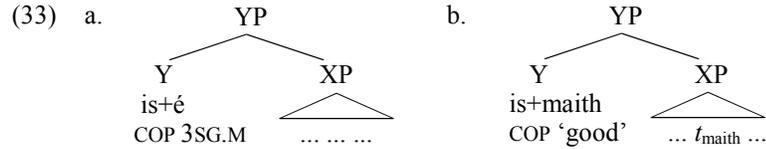
(31)   a.   (Is **í**)   Éire   mo thír   dhúchais.
           COP 3SG.F   Ireland my country native
           'Ireland is my native country.'

       b.   *í   Éire   mo thír   dhúchais.
            3SG.F Ireland my country native
            'Ireland is my native country.' (Doherty, 1996: (61))

Doherty (1996:§3.1) claims that the pronominal augment is an agreement marker, generated in I^0, with the copula *is*. This accounts for (31), as well as the fact that the copula+augment sequence survives in the response system of the equative construction:

(32)   a.   An   é   Seán an dochtúir?
           Q.COP 3SG.ACC Seán the doctor
           Is Seán the doctor?

       b.   Is   é   < ~~Seán an   dochtúir~~ >.
            COP 3SG.ACC   Seán the doctor
            'Yes.' (Doherty, 1996: §3.1)

I adopt Doherty's (1996) analysis to the AFC, while I remain agnostic regarding the exact location of the copula+adjective sequence. The inverted adjective undergoes head-movement where the copula *is* is, as shown in (33b) below. The copula in the adjective inversion construction cannot be deleted alone because deletion targets an X^0 constituent. The recoverability condition explains why we cannot delete the copula+adjective sequence of the adjective inversion

construction (though the copula+augment sequence can), as it involves deletion of a contentful item (Fiengo and Lasnik, 1972).

(33) a.
```
           YP
          /  \
         Y    XP
       is+é   /\
      COP 3SG.M  ... ... ...
```
b.
```
           YP
          /  \
         Y    XP
      is+maith  /\
      COP 'good'  ... t_maith ...
```

5.   Conclusion

This paper considered the copula construction with adjective fronting. I provide several new empirical findings by scrutinizing the Predicate Fronting Analysis (PFA) that Carnie (1995) proposes. I conclude that the PFA does not appear to be tenable and that an analysis based on head-movement of the fronted adjective appears more plausible.

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