

While we're on the Subject...

Nigel Duffield

In contrast to most of the other contributors to this webschrift, I have not known Liliane Haegeman in any of the usual professional roles: she has never been my department colleague, teacher or mentor (in the obvious sense); indeed, over the years we have met in person no more than a handful of times. Yet for most of my career Liliane has been a constant familiar, guiding and supporting my efforts to understand syntax and language acquisition better than would otherwise have been possible. A 'shoulder angel' of sorts—always of the good kind. Why she ever took on this role is not something I can explain, though I suspect I'm not the only one to benefit from her altruistic advice and generosity of spirit. In gratitude, I offer the following recollection of two early occasions where her interventions were most telling. As it turns out, neither of the questions that I was trying to address received a satisfactory solution at the time. This most likely reflects failures on my part, and since these shortcomings would have gone unnoticed but for her, perhaps I shouldn't be so grateful. On the other hand—and this is the justification for this contribution—the two problems have remained something of an embarrassment for standard versions of generative theory ever since, and it seems right that they should be dusted off in her honour. With luck, this will encourage a new generation of linguists to find more imaginative solutions, or at least not reinvent the wheel.

1 Subjects, Case and Negation in Hiberno-English

Almost exactly thirty years ago, I wrote my first term paper in graduate school. Titled *A Case for Default Values*, it examined the origins of certain constructions found in Hiberno-English (HE), first brought to general attention by P. L. Henry (1977).¹ In the original paper, subsequently presented at WECOL (Duffield 1989),

¹P. L. Henry is no relation of Alison Henry, as far as I'm aware. In his work, Henry (1977) uses the term Anglo-Irish, which is now generally dispreferred: see Filppula (2002), for discussion. I

the main concern was to account for the acceptability of HE examples such as those in (1) and (2) below, all of which are grammatically unacceptable in standard varieties of English (on both sides of the Atlantic):

- (1) a. 'T'is an aise to the gate, they to be married.'
b. 'T'was a loss to the country, Michael to die.'
c. 'She to go and he to follow her, t'is the best anymore.'
d. 'Typical,' said Morrissey, as she walked away, 'a *female* like that to spoil a funeral.'²
- (2) a. '...surely not knowing the way, they just give him a slap or something like that and he, oh he to be afraid of the life of him.'
b. 'D'you mind the day, and we in the old castle?'
c. 'I heard the hens cacklin', and I went over to see what it was, and here it was a fox, and he with a hen.'

As should be clear, the theoretical interest of such sentences lies in the nominative case-marking on non-finite subjects, most evident in those examples involving pronominal subjects (1a), (1c): then and still, these sentences offer a *prima facie* challenge to traditional generativist assumptions linking nominative case to finiteness (Chomsky 1981, Pesetsky & Torrego 2002; cf. Szabolcsi 2009, esp. McFadden & Sundaresan 2011).³

The specific question I was concerned with at the time was whether the apparent 'default subject case' option had arisen in Hiberno-English through contact with Modern Irish; alternatively, whether the Hiberno-English infinitival construction was the vestige of a licensing option previously observed in 'mainland' Early Modern English. Both hypotheses are supported by circumstantial evidence. On the one hand, as discussed in Chung & McCloskey (1987), Modern Irish freely allows overt subjects in small clauses in the absence of any obvi-

remain indebted to Markku Filppula for giving me access to the data exemplified in (5) below.

²William Trevor, *Mrs Eckdorf in O'Neill's Hotel* (The Bodley Head, 1969).

³A different strand of the same thread, originating with Raposo (1987), linked nominative case-marking to Agreement, rather than Tense: in Raposo's work, infinitival clauses in European Portuguese were claimed to license nominative case just in case the non-finite verb was inflected for person agreement. Subsequent work by Pires (2002), mentioned in Sundaresan & McFadden (2009), shows that varieties of Brazilian Portuguese without agreement nevertheless continue to allow nominative-marked subjects; see also Longa (1994), Landau (2004). These facts lead the latter authors to conclude that person agreement is coincidental, rather than causal. However this should be analyzed, it will be clear that morphological Agreement (with or without a capital letter) is irrelevant to non-finite clauses in all varieties of Present Day English.

ous licensor—albeit these are marked with accusative, rather than nominative, case—see (3) below; on the other hand, Late Middle English and Early Modern English apparently tolerated nominative subjects in the same non-finite contexts, as evidenced by the examples in (4) from Visser (1963), see also Sundaresan & McFadden (2009).

- (3) a. Bhuail mé leis, agus [s é dhá mhíle as baile].
struck I with-him and him.ACC 2 miles from home
'I met him, as he was two miles from home.'
- b. Tháinig sé isteach, agus [s é iontach sásta leis féin].
came he inside, and him.ACC very happy with-him self
'He came in very happy with himself.' (Chung & McCloskey 1987)
- c. Is mór an suaimhneas don gheata [s iad a bheith
is great the ease to-the gate s them-ACC to be-VN
pósta].
married].
'T'is an aise to the gate they to be married.' (Henry 1957; cf. (1a) above)
- (4) a. I to make me blith or glad ... [th]at nu mai be... [14th C]
- b. A king to kepe his lygis in justice, Without doute that is his offise... [1385]
- c. Men to seye to women wel, it is best, And nor for to despise hem ne depraue. [1402]
- d. A preest for to freli take and chose of alle maidens to hem a wijf...was allowed of Poul [1449]
- e. Thou to love that loueth not the, is but grete foly. [1470]
- f. She to dy so dangerously ... that was the thing that greued me so. [1570]

Partly due to the paucity of historical evidence, the provenance issue was not resolved, and this parochial phenomenon might have completely escaped further attention, were it not for the availability of another non-standard subject type found in (some of) the same HE varieties, namely, NPI-subjects in finite main clauses, as shown in (5):

- (5) a. But from that day out, anyone that was on the meitheal, or anyone in the parish never said a bit t'him, or never done...made a move to have sport on him...

- b. Aha. Although anybody don' seem to like to live in Russia...They're all trying to get out of it...
- c. you couldn't pick a daisy but it was a sin. Now, anything is no sin...

In a follow-up conference paper, I sought to relate the grammaticality of these two constructions to a third HE anomaly, namely, the phenomenon of Singular Concord (SC) observed in Belfast English, discussed in A. M. Henry (1992, 1995), whereby plural lexical NPs in canonical position can appear with default (singular) agreement—in contrast to pronominal and/or inverted subjects, which always require plural agreement. Compare the examples in (6):

- (6) a. Them eggs is cracked/*They is cracked/They are cracked.
- b. Them ones wants more than them other ones/What do/*does them ones want?

Extending Henry's (1992, 1995) account of SC, it was proposed that matrix clauses in HE and Early Modern English varieties differ(ed) from Standard varieties in containing a higher functional projection (AgrP) above TP (AgrP[^]NegP[^]TP), and in allowing default case to be assigned in (non-root) Spec, TP; cf. McCloskey (2001). Given this parametric option, underspecified DPs lacking person features (6: *them eggs*) need raise no higher than TP for Case, and need not agree (*is* shows default singular agreement). Subject NPIs (5: *anyone was...*) are then licensed in virtue of having a case-marked copy within the scope of negation (Duffield 1992/1993). On this approach, the diachronic loss of nominative subjects in infinitivals in Standard English—as well as absence of the other two properties—was taken to stem from the loss of AgrP, and subsequent re-analysis of the root projection as TP, as diagrammed in (7); cf. Roberts (1993).

- (7) [AgrP [NegP [TP [NOM] ...]]] → [TP [NOM] [Neg [...]]]

The analysis is undoubtedly outdated, most notably in its construal of AgrP as an autonomous functional projection, and in its appeal to Case as a licenser and as principal driver of syntactic movement to Spec, TP (Chomsky 2001, cf. Nevins 2004). Even at the time, the analysis was probably seriously flawed. Yet it did at least draw a connection between two kinds of anomalous subject that most generative researchers had totally ignored up to that point. Just as importantly from a personal point of view, the analysis apparently had sufficient merit to persuade Liliane to include it in a special issue of *Rivista di Linguistica*, on the syntax of sentential negation (Haegeman 1993). Which in turn gave me my first journal

article and—I suspect (though cannot prove)—led to my first job after graduate school.⁴

2 Pro-drop in Early Child German

If Liliane’s invitation helped me into my first paid employment, as a post-doc in Harald Clahsen’s LEXLERN project on child German, her support of the research begun there also helped me into the next position, at McGill.⁵ Once again, the focus of this work was on anomalous subjects: this time, however, on null-subjects in German.

As is well-known—implicitly to native-speakers, explicitly to professional linguists and German language teachers—Standard German is not a *pro*-drop language: as in English, the subjects of finite clauses must be pronounced. Yet viewed from the bottom up—which is to say, from the PLD perspective of the child learner—this ban on null-subjects is quite unexpected. This is for three reasons that also distinguish German from English: first, German is a ‘topic-drop’ language, allowing omission of initial topics (8); second, it allows null-expletives (except in initial position) (9); finally, it has a relatively rich person-number verb-agreement paradigm, something that is often considered key to *pro*-identification; Rohrbacher (1993), cf. Bobaljik (1997).

- (8) a. (Ich) hab es gestern gekauft.
(I) have it yesterday bought
'I bought it yesterday.'
- b. (Er) sagt, daß *(er) es gestern gekauft hat.
(he) says, COMP (he) it yesterday bought has
'He says he bought it yesterday.'
- c. Gestern hab' *(ich) es gekauft.
yesterday have (I) it bought
'I bought it yesterday.'

⁴As hard as it is to believe now, having one journal article published before completing graduate school counted as a distinguishing achievement in the early 1990s.

⁵Or it might have been my next job (University of Sheffield). The lag between initial presentation of the data at acquisition conferences in 1992-93, submission of the initial draft of the paper, hiatuses between revisions, and final publication in 2008, spanned 15 years, during which time Liliane’s support both as known commentator and as anonymous reviewer proved invaluable.

- (9) a. ... daß *ec* dem Mann das Buch geschenkt wurde.
 that the. DAT man the-.NOM book presented
 [Biberauer 2008]
 became
 ‘... that the book was given to the man (as a present).’
- b. .. weil *ec* ja doch Linguisten Kammermusik
 because MOD.PART. linguists chamber-music play
 spielen
 ‘... since there are linguists playing chamber music.’

So what do young German children think about null subjects? That was the focus of my two-year study in Düsseldorf, which compared the Strong Continuity/Very Early Parameter Setting claims of Rizzi (1994, 2000), Wexler (1994, 1998) and others, with the Weak Continuity/Structure Building approach of the LEXLERN project (Clahsen & Penke 1992, Clahsen et al. 1994, 1996); cf. Haegeman (1996). The two approaches to early syntax diverged most sharply on the issue of postverbal null-subjects in finite V2 clauses, termed ‘Rogues’ in Duffield (1992/1993, 2008): whereas Strong Continuity approaches predicted their non-occurrence—Root Infinitive subjects aside, German children should never entertain the possibility of a null-subject grammar—the Weak Continuity predicted the opposite, namely, it was expected that children should pass through a stage after the development of an underspecified AgrP (but prior to the development of CP) during which Rogues should be a grammatical option. Data from four out of six LEXLERN⁶ children whose transcribed corpus data I analyzed provide rather clear support for the latter approach: not only did all of these children produce Rogues, such as those illustrated in (10), but in each case, these were only observed at significant levels within one developmental window, just before their production of finite complement clauses.

- (10) a. Einen Strohhalm mach’ *ec* jetzt. (Matthias.22: 089)
 a-ACC straw make-1SG now
 ‘I’m making a straw now.’
- b. So sieht *ec* das nicht. (Katrin.07: 021)
 so see-3SG that not
 ‘That way, he doesn’t see it.’

⁶In fact, the study drew on data from three separate corpora, to which the project had access.

- c. Die Margot hab' ec gehört. (Svenja.06: 134a)
 the Margot have-1SG heard
 'I have heard Margot.'

Once again, my interpretation may be flawed—the framework has surely been superseded, AgrP is so 1990s—but the data remain, as a thorn in the side of those who reject parametric approaches, and who discount any significant learning from the input. And once more, had it not been for Liliane's support and encouragement, these data would likely never have seen the light of (theoretical) day. Even with her help, the journey took fifteen years!

Thus, I use this opportunity to thank Liliane for supporting research on things that shouldn't be present, but are, or should be absent, but aren't, for being so. While we are on the subject.

References

- Bobaljik, J.D. 1997. If the head fits: On the morphological determination of Germanic syntax. *Linguistics* 35. 1029–1055.
- Chomsky, N. 1981. *Lectures on Government and Binding: The Pisa Lectures*. Dordrecht: Foris.
- Chomsky, N. 2001. Derivation by phase. In M. Kenstowicz (ed.), *Ken Hale: A life in language*. 1–52. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Chung, S. & McCloskey, J. 1987. Government, barriers, and small clauses in Modern Irish. *Linguistic Inquiry* 18. 173–237.
- Clahsen, H., Eisenbeiß & Vainikka, A. 1994. The seeds of structure: A syntactic analysis of the acquisition of case marking. In T. Hoekstra & B. Schwartz (eds.), *Language acquisition studies In Generative Grammar*. 85–118. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Clahsen, H., Eisenbeiß, S. & Penke, M. 1996. Lexical learning in early syntactic development. In H. Clahsen (ed.), *Generative perspectives on language acquisition: Empirical findings, theoretical considerations and crosslinguistic comparisons*. 129–160. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Clahsen, H. & Penke, M. 1992. The acquisition of agreement morphology and its syntactic consequences: New evidence on German child language from the Simone-corpus. In J. Meisel (ed.), *The acquisition of verb placement*. 181–223. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

- Duffield, N. 1992/1993. Roots and rogues: Null subjects in German child language. University of Düsseldorf, McGill University.
- Duffield, N. 2008. Roots and rogues in German child language. *Language Acquisition* 15. 225–269.
- Filppula, M. 2002. *The grammar of Irish English: Language in Hibernian style*. London: Routledge.
- Haegeman, L. 1993. Introduction to the syntax of sentential negation. *Rivista di Linguistica* 7. 183–214.
- Haegeman, L. 1996. Verb second, the split CP and initial null subjects in Dutch. *GenGenP* 4. 93–120.
- Henry, A. 1992. Why we don't agree: Singular concord in Belfast English. Ms., University of Ulster at Jordanstown.
- Henry, A. 1995. *Belfast English and Standard English: Dialect variation and parameter setting*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Henry, P.L. 1957. *An Anglo-Irish dialect of North Roscommon*. Zurich: Aschmann & Scheller.
- Henry, P.L. 1977. Anglo-Irish and its Irish background. In D. Ó Muirthe (ed.), *The English language in Ireland*. 20–36. Cork: The Mercier Press.
- Landau, I. 2004. The scale of finiteness and the calculus of control. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 22. 811–877.
- Longa, V.M. 1994. The Galician inflected infinitive and the theory of *ug*. *Catalan Working Papers in Linguistics* 4. 23–44.
- McCloskey, J. 2001. On the distribution of subject properties in Irish. In W.D. Davies & S. Dubinsky (eds.), *Objects and other subjects*. 157–192. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Nevins, A. 2004. Derivations without the Activity Condition. In M. McGinnis & N. Richards (eds.), *Perspectives on phases (MIT Working Papers in Linguistics # 49)*. 287–310. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Pesetsky, D. & Torrego, E. 2002. Tense, case and the nature of syntactic categories. In J. Guéron, J. Lecarme & A. Lecarme (eds.), *The syntax of time*. 495–538. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Pires, A. 2002. Cue-based change: Inflection and subjects in the history of Portuguese infinitives. In D. Lightfoot (ed.), *Syntactic effects of morphological change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Raposo, E. 1987. Case theory and infl-to-comp: The inflected infinitive in European Portuguese. *Linguistic Inquiry* 18. 85–109.

- Rizzi, L. 1994. Early null subjects and root null subjects. In T. Hoekstra & B.D. Schwartz (eds.), *Language acquisition studies in generative grammar*. 151–176. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Rizzi, L. 2000. Remarks on early null subjects. In M.A. Friedemann & L. Rizzi (eds.), *The acquisition of syntax: Studies in comparative developmental linguistics*. London: Longman.
- Roberts, I. 1993. *Verbs and diachronic syntax*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Rohrbacher, B.W. 1993. *The germanic VO languages and the full paradigm: A theory of V to I raising*: University of Massachusetts Amherst dissertation.
- Sundaresan, S. & McFadden, T. 2009. DP distribution and finiteness in Tamil and other languages: Selection vs. Case. *Journal of South Asian Linguistics* 2. 5–34.
- Szabolcsi, A. 2009. Overt nominative subjects in infinitival complements crosslinguistically: Data, diagnostics, and preliminary analyses. *NYU Working Papers in Linguistics: Papers in Syntax* 2. <http://as.nyu.edu/content/nyu-as/as/departments/linguistics/graduate/nyu-working-papers-in-linguistics.html#vol2>.
- Visser, F.T. 1963. *An historical syntax of the english language*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.
- Wexler, K. 1994. Optional infinitives, head movement and the economy of derivations. In D.W. Lightfoot & N. Hornstein (eds.), *Verb movement*. 305–350. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wexler, K. 1998. Very early parameter-setting and the Unique Checking Constraint: A new explanation of the optional infinitive stage. *Lingua* 106. 23–79.