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Old Irish

Morphosyntactic Structures – Part 3



A Roadmap

Verbs and Verb phrases
finite vs non-finite
alignment
semantic roles
voice and valency

Text examples: *Táin bó Froích*

Predication



Finite vs. non-finite predication

- **FINITE PREDICATION:** any verbal form with marking for PERSON, NUMBER, TENSE, ASPECT, MOOD, VOICE; e.g. He goes to the store on Fridays.
- **NON-FINITE PREDICATION:** a verbal form lacking (some of) the above categories; e.g. Going to the store on Fridays made him happy.

Structural properties: Alignment

- ALIGNMENT (FINITE PREDICATION): In Old Irish, finite predication is almost entirely nominative-accusative. In a ditransitive construction:

do·m-bera *dia* *fortacht* *do-nd=fiur* *firíen* (Ml. 57c4)
PRV·NAS-give.3SG God.NOM.SG help.ACC.SG to-ART.DAT.SG.M=man.DAT.SG righteous.DAT.SG.M
‘that God would give help to the righteous man’

Structural properties: Alignment

- ALIGNMENT (NON-FINITE PREDICATION): In Old Irish, non-finite predication is essentially ergative.

cen=tabairt *dait=siu* *du=fortachtae* *dún=ni* (Ml. 87d8)
without=giving.ACC.SG to.2SG=2SG 2SG=help.GEN.SG to.1PL=1PL
'without You giving your help to us'

air=is *ansu* *de* *a=dothaim* (Ml. 131b4)
for=is.3SG hard.CMPTV from.3SG.M 3PL=falling.NOM.SG
'for their falling is harder because of it'

Structural properties: Semantic Roles

■ FINITE VERBS:

- A(gent) and S(ubject): nominative
- P(atient): accusative
- R(ecipient): preposition *do* 'to, for'

■ VERBAL NOUNS:

- A(gent): prepositional *do* 'to, for'
- P(atient) and S(ubject): genitive
- R(ecipient): preposition *do* 'to, for'

Structural properties: Semantic Roles

NON-CANONICAL SUBJECTS are very frequent in all manner of expressions.

- *la* ‘with’ + accusative: subjective; e.g. *dattae* ‘fine, stately’

is *dattae* *lim*
is.3SG fine.NOM.SG.NT with.1SG
‘it pleases me / I like’

- *do* ‘to, for’ + dative: objective; e.g. *úar* ‘cold’

mar-úar *dom* (Sg. 114a)
large-cold to.1SG
‘I am very cold’

Structural properties: Semantic Roles

NON-FINITE EXPRESSIONS: ‘do-infinitives’

Noun₁ + *do* ‘to, for’ + Verbal Noun functions as an infinitive

Noun₁ can be the agent / subject or patient of the infinitive

is=bés... *in=daim* *do=thúarcuin* *ind=arbe* (Wb. 10d6)

is.3SG=custom.NOM.SG ART.NOM.PL.M=OX.NOM.PL to=tread.DAT.SG ART.GEN.SG.NT=grain.GEN.SG

‘that the oxen tread out the grain is a custom’

as=n-accubur *linn* *ní* *du=thabairt* (Ml. 98a4)

is.3SG.REL=NAS-desire.NOM.SG with.1PL something.NOM.SG.NT to=giving.DAT.SG

‘that it is a desire for us to give something’

Structural properties: non-verbal predication

SUBSTANTIVE VERB *AT·TÁ* 'IS, EXISTS' VS. COPULA *IS* 'IS'

Copula (V – Pred – S): used when the predicate is a noun or adjective.

am=cimbid=se (Wb. 27c22)

is.1SG=prisoner.NOM.SG=1SG

'I am a prisoner'

Substantive verb (V – S – PP / adv): used when the predicate is an adverb or PP.

at·taith=si immelei (Wb. 10a6)

PRV·is.2PL=2PL together

'You are together'

Structural properties: Possession

POSSESSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS are marked on verbs 'to be' prepositionally:

at·tá / is X la Y 'Y has X' (comitative strategy: X is with Y)

at·tá X oc Y 'Y has X' (locational strategy: X is by Y)

Alternative: *at·tá* 'is, exists' + infixed or suffixed pronouns

no·m·thá or *táthum*

PRV-1SG.OBJ.is.3SG is.3SG.1SG.OBJ

'I have' (literally 'there is to me')

Voice and valency change: passive

PASSIVE is marked by a unique set of endings in all tenses and moods.

AGENTS are almost never present with passives; quasi-agents can be expressed by *la* 'with' / *tre* 'through' / *ó* 'from' (Latinism?).

altae=som *ém* *la=máthair* *ocus* *la=athair* (TBC I 1465)
rear.3SG.PRET.PASS=3SG.M indeed with=mother.ACC.SG and with=father.ACC.SG
'He was indeed raised by (his) mother and father' –or– '...with (his) mother and father'

Voice and valency change: passive

Object to subject promotion only occurs in the 3rd person.

1st and 2nd person passives are impersonals.

Ar·osailcther *hires* *tri=degním* (Ml. 14c15)
PRV·open.3SG.PASS faith.NOM.SG through=good-doing.ACC.SG
'faith is opened through doing good'

atat·chigestar (Ml. 59c12)
PRV.2SG.OBJ·see.3SG.FUT.PASS
'you will be seen'

Voice and valency change: passive and middle

Unlike most Indo-European languages, PASSIVE MORPHOLOGY is different from MIDDLE MORPHOLOGY:

ad·ágathar 'he fears' ≠ *ad·áigther* 'he is feared'

MIDDLE MORPHOLOGY lost during the course of Old Irish.

foilsigidir = *foilsigid* 'he reveals'

Voice and valency change: reciprocals

- Reciprocals are expressed with the preverb *imma*^N + verb

immus·n-acallat *íarum* *Ailill* *ocus* *Medb* (TBF §14 l. 143)

RECIPR·NAS-address.3PL after.3SG.NT PN.NOM.SG and PN.NOM.SG

‘Ailill and Medb then converse’

- Develops into an impersonal: *imma*^N + verb + *do* + Noun_{subj.}

imma·tarraid *dún* (LL 113a2)

RECIPR·reach.3SG to.1PL

‘we reach one another’

Ad·tlochur indithim dúib!