The syntax and semantics of Irish Demonic Negation

Nicola D'Antuono – University of Padua

The aim of this study is to investigate the interaction between negation and Focus in the left periphery. The scope and semantics of negative preposing and constituent negation with respect to quantified expressions have been analysed by Collins (2020) and Etxepare & Uribe-Etxebarria (2021), and the relation between negative polarity and Focus has received considerable attention in recent years, having been investigated by Aboh (2010), De Clercq (2013, 2020), Garzonio & Poletto (2015), and Poletto (2017). With different implementations, the latter authors propose a left-peripheral projection which encodes sentential polarity, related to or even identified with FocP, which is either overtly or covertly filled by a suitable operator in the course of the derivation. I will argue that this insight is correct and propose a cartographic approach such that the left periphery hosts a negative projection above FocP, in addition to the lower PolP in the IP layer (Laka 1990).

The reason why Irish is interesting with respect to the relation between negation and the left periphery is that it displays a rigid Neg-First condition (Acquaviva 1996) requiring negation and monotone decreasing quantifiers to occur exclusively in the left periphery. Sentential negation is expressed on negative complementisers, which always take wide scope (Ostrove 2013). To substantiate my claims, I will capitalize on a peculiar Irish emphatic construction, dubbed 'demonic negation' (DemNeg; cf. McCloskey 1979, 2001, Ó Siadhail 1980, 1991), exemplified in (1):

(1)　　a.　　**dheamhan** a　gclois-feadh sé béicíl　　na　　　　ngasúr
　　　　　　　demon　　aN hear-COND　he shouting the.GEN.PL children.GEN
　　　　　　　'He wouldn't hear the shouting of the children'
　　　　b.　　**dheamhan duine** a　chonaic mé
　　　　　　　demon　　　man　aL saw　　I
　　　　　　　'Not a man did I see'

Given its negative import, DemNeg only occurs in the C-domain. Irish has a series of complementisers which appear when an A'-dependency is realised. These complementisers occur with relatives, (reduced) clefts, Focus and *wh*-movement, and pronominal resumption. In (1a) DemNeg scopes over a clause introduced by the complementiser *aN*, indicative of pronominal resumption in the embedded clause (McCloskey 2001). In (1b), the embedded clause is headed by an XP followed by the *aL* complementiser, which is employed when binding of a trace or copy occurs in the embedded clause. In (1a) DemNeg scopes over a clause in which all the argumental positions are filled and, despite the presence of the *aN* complementiser, no overt resumptive element appears in the embedded clause (cf. McCloskey 2002). On the other hand, the fact that the XP to the right of *dheamhan* can be an NP, PP, or AP indicates that *dheamhan* is not a negative quantifier exclusively taking NP complements, like English *no* (cf. (3)). A structural explanation of DemNeg must then account for the appearance of the resumptive complementiser *aN* in (1a), and for the position of the XP following *dheamhan* in (1b).

I propose the following structures for (1a) and (1b):

(2) a. [$_{ForceP}$ [$_{TopicP}$ [$_{NegP}$ *dheamhan* [$_{FocP}$ [$_{FinP}$ *Op$_i$ aN* [$_{PolP}$ Pol° [$_{TP}$ T° [$_{VP}$ [$_{EventP}$ *pro$_i$*] V°]]]]]]]]]

　　b. [$_{ForceP}$ [$_{TopicP}$ [$_{NegP}$ *dheamhan* [$_{FocP}$ XP$_i$ Foc° [$_{FinP}$ *aL* [$_{PolP}$ Pol° [$_{TP}$ T° [$_{VP}$ V° t$_i$]]]]]]]]]

In (2), *dheamhan* is base-generated in the left-peripheral NegP, which accounts for its wide scope in both cases, while the lower PolP is the landing site of the finite verb, as recently argued by McCloskey (2017), and Bennett et al. (2019). (2a) follows McCloskey (2002), who claims for cases of adjunct extraction, which similarly present an *aN* complementiser without an overt resumptive pronoun, that a null temporal or locative *pro* is present in the embedded clause which agrees with a null operator base-generated in SpecCP (here SpecFinP), below the adjunct

itself. Translating McCloskey's intuition into Higginbotham's (1985) account, I thus propose that the resumptive form of the complementiser in the case of (1a/2a) is due to agreement of *Op* with a *pro* which corresponds to the event argument, situated in an EventP which is the syntactic realisation of the E-position proposed by Higginbotham (1985, 2005) (cf. Davidson 1966). EventP is projected in the V-domain, the syntactic domain associated with the event description (cf. Svenonius & Ramchand 2014). My analysis is thus in line with Acquaviva's (1996, 1997) original understanding of sentential negation as existential closure of the event variable by a negated existential operator.

In (2b), where I adapt McCloskey's (2002) treatment of *aL* dependencies for ease of exposition, the XP moves to SpecFocP, triggering the *aL* complementiser. Thus, emphatic negation of the XP below DemNeg in (1b/2b) is syntactically decomposed as Focus of the XP plus the negative import of DemNeg. In addition to the interpretation in (1b), similar to that of Negative Preposing in Germanic (Haegeman 2000, Büring 2004), DemNeg can also have an interpretation as constituent or contrastive negation, as confirmed by the possibility of a continuation with non-concessive *but* (Horn 1989):

(3) Dheamhan isteach ná amach a   bhí aici, ach ina   staic i lár   an   gheata
    demon   in   nor   out   aL was at.her but in.her post in middle the.GEN gate.GEN
    'It would go neither in nor out, but stayed right in the middle of the gate'

Still, in favour the analysis in (2b) is the fact that DemNeg does not only have narrow scope over the XP to its right. This is demonstrated by the fact that it licenses NPIs and exceptives inside the embedded clause:

(4)   a.   Dheamhan tásc   ná tuairisc a bhí le   feiceáil ar **aon** channaí folmha
             demon   report nor account aL was with seeing on any cans   empty
             'No report nor account was to be seen on any empty cans'
       b.   Dheamhan duine a bhí ann **ach** thú féin
             demon   man   aL was in.it but you self
             'No-one was there but you'

Moreover, assuming that the XP following DemNeg is in Focus explains both the fact that it bears stress, and also the use of DemNeg in fragment answers, derivable as ellipsis after Foc° (Merchant 2004):

(5)   A: An   bhfuil toitín   agat?   B: Dhemahan toitín (a-tá agam)
             C.INT is   cigarette at.you   demon   cigarette aL-is at.me
             'Do you have a cigarette?   'Not a cigarette (do I have)'

Finally, a further confirmation for the structural analysis in (2) comes from the fact that topics appear to the left of *dheamhan*:

(6) Seachas   na   súile, dheamhan mórán suntais   a thabhar-fadh duine di
    apart.from the.PL eyes demon   much attention.GEN aL give-COND   man   to.her
    'Apart from the eyes, one would not pay much attention to her'

The facts described so far are expected under the view that sentential polarity must always be realised, either overtly or covertly (De Clercq 2020): when it is overtly realised by DemNeg, the sentence is negated by externally merging *dheamhan* in the high NegP. While the morphological form of the complementiser in (1a/2a) forces an analysis of *dheamhan* as base-generated in the left periphery, this analysis can be extended to the cases in (1b/2b) in a 'mixed' approach whereby DemNeg is merged in NegP and the XP is subsequently moved to SpecFocP. Irish thus provides a valuable insight into the scope of left peripheral negation and, even more relevantly, an interesting perspective on the relation between negation and the E-position.

SELECTED REFERENCES: Acquaviva, P. 1996. Negation in Irish and the representation of monotone decreasing quantifiers. In Borsley, R. D., and I. Roberts (eds.). *The syntax of the Celtic languages. A comparative perspective*. Cambridge: CUP • De Clercq, K. 2020. Types of negation. In Espinal, M. T., and V. Déprez (eds.). *The Oxford Handbook of Negation*.

Oxford/New York: OUP • Etxepare, R., and M. Uribe-Etxebarria. 2021. Three strategies for constituent negation. Presentation at IGG 46, University of Siena • Higginbotham, J. 1985. On semantics. *Ling. Inq.* 16(4) • McCloskey, J. 2017. Ellipsis, polarity, and the cartography of verb-initial orders in Irish. In Aboh, E., E. Haeberli, G. Puskás, and M. Schönenberger (eds.). *Elements of comparative syntax: theory and description*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.