Irish Existentials: Predicates and Definiteness

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1 Preliminaries—Clause Structure

(1) Thóg sí teach daofa ar an Mhullach Dubh.
'She built a house for them in Mullaghdu.'

Derived from a structure like (2):

(2) [FIN] [TP]

by way of an operation (head-movement, or Wescoat's 2002 'lexical sharing') which merges the contents of τ and v in the position of τ. Which operation does not apply in the case of nonfinite clauses, yielding subject-initial orders:

(3) Níor mhaith leis sin tarlú an chéad uair eile.
'He wouldn't like that to happen the next time.'

with obligatory Object Shift in transitive clauses, yielding sovx orders: 1

(4) B'thearr liom tú iad a dhíol uilig le mo dhearthaír.
'I'd prefer for you to sell them all to my brother.'

Nonfinite clauses freely allow overt (accusative) subjects (McCloskey (1986), McCloskey and Sells (1988)):

(5) Bheinn sásta iad an obair a dhéanamh
'I would-be happy them the work do [-FIN]
'I would be happy for them to do the work.'

Similarly small clauses (Chung and McCloskey (1987)):

(6) Tharla é fein sa chuídeachta.
'happened himself [ACC] in-the company
'He himself happened (to be) in the company.'

With the consequence (as predicted by Case Theory) that small clauses and nonfinite clauses with overt subjects do not show the limited distribution that they show in a language like English.

(7) Bhí Peadar i láthair. É ar buile.
'Peter present him furious
'Peter was present. He was furious.'

2 Existentials—The Basics

(8) a. Beidh go leor bia ann.
 'There'll be plenty of food.'
 b. Tá daoine ann nach mbeadh sásta glacadh leis.
 'There are people who would not be willing to accept it.'
 c. Leithéid an tainistí in ann sin ann.
 'There were no cars in those days.'
 d. B' éigeann dó go raibh marbhradh shruth beag ann
 'It must have been that there was a slight current.'

The element ann is at least homophonous with a locative expression meaning there:

(9) a. Cuireadh ann muid dha bhliain ó shin.
 'Were-sent in-it us two year ago
'Were we sent there two years ago.'
 b. Pósadh i Meiriceá é, agus tá sé ann ó shin.
 'He got married in America him and he there since
'He got married in America, and he has been there ever since.'


1In the dialects with which we will be mostly concerned here.
3 Preliminary Analysis

(10)  

The sequence \([ \text{tá} \ \text{dp} \ \text{ann} ]\) appears in the full range of small clause contexts documented in Chung and McCloskey (1987). As complement to verbs other than \(\text{be}\):

(11)  

a. Fágann sin cuid mhóir daoine ann nach bhfuil aic ar leaves that many people in-it NEG C is access at-them on
services healing \(\text{[GEN]}\)
'That means that there are many people who have no access to health care.'

b. ó tharla tráthnóna breá ann
since happened evening fine in-it
'since there happened to be a fine evening'

As complement to adjectives/adverbs:

(12)  

a. Is fada [ daoine ann a ghéilleann do phiseoga ].
\(\text{COP[PRES]}\) long people in-it C yield to superstitions
'There have long been people who believe in superstitions.'

b. Is maith [ na bádaí beaga ann ].
\(\text{COP[PRES]}\) good the boats small in-it
'It’s a good thing that there are the small boats.' \(\text{TDP}\)

c. Is annamh baisteach ann.
\(\text{COP[PRES]}\) rare rain in-it
'There's rarely (any) rain.' \(\text{D0196}\)

As complement to \(\text{agus}\) ('and') in an absolutive construction:

(13)  

Agus daoine ann a ghéilleann do phiseoga.
and people in-it C yield to superstitions
'As long as there are people who believe in superstitions'

And in syntactic isolation:

(14)  

An charraig chomh fada ann gur ...
the rock so long now in-it C
'The rock so long in existence now that …' \(\text{AFAP} \ 142\)

Initial Conclusion

The distribution of the existential structure in (15) is independent of the verb \(\text{be}\):

(15)  

\([ \text{dp} \ \text{ann} ]\)

Therefore we can refine (10) to (16):

(16)  

\([ \text{tá} \ [ \text{dp} \ \text{ann} ]\])

We seem, then, to be dealing with structures like (17):

(17)  

\(\text{sc}\)

\(\text{DP} \ \text{XP} \ [\text{PRED}]\)

\(\text{ann}\)

4 An Existential Predicate

Existential \(\text{ann}\) also appears in one of the predicative copula constructions, which has the schematic structure in (18), in which \(\text{xp}\) is a predicative phrase and in which \(\text{dp}\) is its subject (Doherty (1996), Carnie (1995), DeGraff (1997), Doherty (1997), Legate (1997), Legate (1998), McCloskey (2005)):

(18)  

\([ \text{Tense} \ \text{xp} \ [\text{PRED}] \ (do+) \ \text{dp} ]\)

(19)  

a. Is as Doire dó.
\(\text{COP[PRES]}\) out-of Derry to-him
'He’s from Derry.'

b. Má-s pósta dhó
if \(\text{COP[PRES]}\) married to-him
'if he’s married' \(\text{LNT96}\)

c. is dócha nach saor domsa
\(\text{COP[PRES]}\) probable NEG C free to-me
'I am probably not free.' \(\text{ROM38}\)

d. ag rá gur beo fós do Phresley
\(\text{say [PROG]}\) C-\(\text{COP[PRES]}\) alive still to Presley
'saying that Presley is still alive' \(\text{DI31}\)
5 Two Additional Observations

Complementarity

The existential predicate is in complementary distribution with other predicates:

(21a) Tá daoine sa teach
    be [PRES] people in-the house
    ‘There are people in the house.’

(21b) *Tá daoine ann sa teach.
    be [PRES] people in-it in-the house
    ‘There are people in the house.’

This pattern of complementarity is sometimes obscured by the dual use of locative expressions (as predicate or as modifier):

(22a) Tá daoine ar an bhaile nach mbeannochadh sa tsráid duit.
    be [PRES] people on the town NEG C greet [COND] in-the street to-you
    ‘There are people in the town who wouldn’t say hello in the street.’

(23a) Tá daoine ann ar an bhaile nach mbeannochadh sa tsráid
greet [COND] in-the street
to-you
    be [PRES] people on the town NEG C
    ‘There are people in the town who wouldn’t say hello in the street.’

But Joey Sabbagh’s (p.c.) observation:

(24a) Tá leabhar ag mo dheirfiúr.
    is book at my sister
    ‘My sister has a book.’

(24b) *Tá leabhar ann ag mo dheirfiúr.
    is book in-it at my sister

Semantic Content

Predicative *ann* is semantically contentful, as is shown by the fact that it can be focussed:

(25) Ba *ann* a bhí an saol neamh-bhuardh an t-am sin.
    COP[PAST] in-it it be [PAST] the life untroubled that time
    ‘It really is true that there was an untroubled life at that time.’

6 Interim Summary

Irish has a semantically contentful stage-level existential predicate *ann*. This element appears in the normal range of contexts in which (stage-level?) predicative expressions may appear—in the predicate position of a small clause construction, or in combination with the ‘copula’ (actually a realization of Tense/Modality). When *ann* appears as the predicate of a small clause, the small clause of which it is a sub-part may in turn appear in the standard range of contexts in which small clauses in the language may appear—in syntactic isolation, or else as complement to a range of selecting heads (verbal, adjectival, and functional).

The predicate *ann* is at least diachronically related to a locative expression meaning *there*.

7 A Point of Contact

A connection with work by Borschev and Partee (1998; 2001); for closely related ideas see Dobrovie-Sorin (1997), Musan (1996). Borschev and Partee (2001) propose that existential claims are always made relative to a location that is often implicit but which is nonetheless the perspectival center. They offer the schematic semantic analysis: **be** (**THING, LOC**) for existential sentences. On this view, existentials assert the existence of the referent of a **dp** (**THING**) at a particular (perhaps metaphorical) location (**LOC**). Irish: The predicative expression *ann* realizes the default locative argument often implicit in other languages.

Possible Syntactic Outcomes

- insertion of an expletive, agreement and case-licensing in place: impersonal existentials
- raising of the locative predicate (as in Locative Inversion?), giving rise to locative existentials
8 Two Issues Now Open Out

Q1 How does the sketchy syntax so far outlined get embedded in the larger clausal syntax of the language?
Q2 What of the definiteness restriction?

9 The Definiteness Restriction

Definite Descriptions

(26) a. Ní raibh na purgóidí ann na laethanta úd a táf innnu neg be [PAST] the drugs in-it the days those C be [PRES] today 'There weren't the drugs in those days that there are today.' MBS157
b. Déh mbeadh an tEír Amach ann if be [COND] the rebellion in-it 'If there had been the rebellion' GB101
c. Bhi a fhíos acu go mbeadh an tsochraid ann. be [PAST] knowledge at-them C be [COND] the funeral in-it 'They knew that there would be the funeral.' STL113
d. nuair a bhí an Drochshaol ann when C be [PAST] the Famine in-it 'When there was the Famine' GOG142
e. Bhí ansa Eabhrach na móna ann go deireadh mí Mheán Fómhair be [HABIT] season the turf in-it till end month September 'There's (it's) the turf-season until the end of September.' CF82

(27) a. D'héad clann a chlainne a bheith anois ann can [PAST] children his children be [-FIN] now in-it 'It could be that there are his children's children now.' STL 7
b. ba cheart an tAifreann a bheith ann would-be the mass be [-FIN] in-it 'There ought to be the mass.' IM63
c. Ó tharla an tráthnóna breá ann since happen [PAST] the afternoon fine in-it 'since it happened that there was the nice afternoon' TGC96
b. Dín an regatta ann remain [PAST] the in-it 'The regatta remained (in existence).' STL141
c. agus an oíche ann and the night in-it 'since there (it) was the night' SSPG16


Demonstrative Descriptions

(29) a. Bhi fhíos ag a' diúlach go raibh si seo ann be [PAST] knowledge at the guy C be [PRES] she DEMON in-it 'The guy knew that there was this person.' SAB238
b. go raibh an chontabhairt sin ann C be [PAST] the danger that in-it 'that there was that danger' SBN1119

Proper Names

(30) Táimse ó roimh Ábrahama a bheith ann I-am in-it from before be [-FIN] in-it 'I have existed since before Abraham existed.' NCS251

Personal Pronouns

(31) a. Tá sé ann thart fá chéad bliain be [PRES] it around 100 year 'It has existed for about a hundred years.' MSN236
b. rinne an Chomhairle Chontae dearmad go raibh muid ann made the County Council forgetfulness C be [PAST] we in-it 'The County Council forgot that we existed.' MSN236
b. is móra an trua nach bhfuil siad anois ann. NEG C be [PRES] they now in-it 'It's a great pity that they don't exist now.' MSN227
c. bhí sé ann roimh mo linn be [PAST] he in-it before my time 'He existed before my time.'

(28) a. ó tharla an tráthnóna breá ann since happen [PAST] the afternoon fine in-it 'since it happened that there was the nice afternoon' TGC96
b. Dín an regatta ann remain [PAST] the in-it 'The regatta remained (in existence).' STL141
c. agus an oíche ann and the night in-it 'since there (it) was the night' SSPG16

The guy knew that there was this person.' SAB238
'don't exist now.' MSN227
'He existed before my time.'
'Vey thought that there would always be it (the good weather).’ AI1124
Strong Quantifiers

(32) a. "Tá bunús na ndaoine ann nach mbeidh sásta choíche.
   be [PRES] most the people in-it NEG C be [FUT] satisfied ever
   'There are most people who will never be satisfied.'

b. "Tá achan duine ann nach mbeidh sásta choíche.
   be [PRES] every person in-it NEG C be [FUT] satisfied ever
   'There is everyone who will never be satisfied.'

10 Clausal Architecture Redux

(33) TP

\[ T \quad \text{FIN} \quad V \]

One way of understanding/fleshing out (33):

(34) TP

\[ T \quad \text{FIN} \quad VP \quad V \]

But it is known that this view is too simplistic. There is raising of the subject (in finite clauses to a position to the right of the verb).

One Indicator: A class of adverbs which can appear following the subject but preceding complements and adverbials—riamh (ever), go fóill (still, yet), fós (still, yet), choíche (ever), go minic (always), go fóill (still, yet). They correspond closely to the class identified as VP-external or VP-peripheral in much comparative work and there is strong evidence from within the language also that they are VP-external.

(35) a. Ní bhfuair aon bhean riomh roimh geirim láimhe air.
   NEG took any woman ever before-it grip hand [GEN] on-him
   'No woman had ever before taken his hand.'
   \[ \text{CC17} \]

b. Deireann siad i gcónaí paidir roimh an luí.
   say [PRES] they always prayer before time lie [-FIN]
   'They always say a prayer before bed-time.'

17 What is needed is something at least as elaborate as (36):

(36) TP

\[ \text{F} \quad \text{DFP} \quad \text{DP} \quad \text{FIN} \quad \text{V} \quad \text{Complement} \]

Given (36) (and similar elaborations), it is impossible on the basis of simple inspection alone, to know for (37):

(37) [TP [T+V] DP XP ]

whether the subject TP occupies the higher or the lower position. But the adverbials discussed at (35) provide a probe. In existentials, the 'subject' may follow a peripheral adverb:

(38) a. Ní raibh riomh diospóireachta ann fá na nithe seo.
   NEG be [PAST] ever debate in-it about the things DEMON
   'there was never any debate about these things'  \[ \text{PNG187} \]

b. Bhí chomh maith mórchuid daoine ann.
   be [PAST] also many people in-it
   'there were also many people'  \[ \text{F1236} \]

c. Bionn i gcónaí daoine ann nach ndéanann a dthadh.
   be [PRES-HABIT] always people in-it NEG C do [PRES] nothing
   'There are always people who do nothing.'

(39) d. Tá anois cuid mhór daoine óga ann an tá tugtha.
   be [PRES] now many people young in-it C be [PRES] addicted don öl
to-the drink
   'There are now many young people who are addicted to drink.'
e. Bionn i gcónaí drochaimísir ann Lá 'le Pádraig.
be [PRES-HABIT] always bad-weather in-it St. Patrick's Day
'There is always bad weather on St. Patrick's Day.'

(39) \[ TP be Adv dp ann \]

In this context, the Definiteness Restriction re-emerges in a familiar form. \( dp \) of (39) must be indefinite:

(40) a. *Bhí i gcónaí an Chéad Chogadh Domhanda ann
    be [PAST] still the first war global in-it
    'There was still the First World War.'

b. *Bhí ariamh An Spiorad Naomh ann
    be [PAST] ever the spirit holy in-it
    'There was always the Holy Spirit.'

(41) a. Bhi an Inid anois ann
    be [PAST] now the Shrovetide in-it
    'It was now Shrovetide.'

b. *Bhí anois an Inid ann
    be [PAST] now the Shrovetide in-it
    'It was now Shrovetide.'

(42) a. Beidh na Dilseoiri i gcónaí ann.
    be [FUT] the Loyalists always in-it
    'There will always be the Loyalists.'

b. *Beidh i gcónaí na Dilseoiri ann.
    be [FUT] always the Loyalists in-it
    'There will always be the Loyalists.'

Note, though, that there is no requirement that indefinites remain in the low position:

(43) a. Ni bhiodh aon nursanna an uair sin ann.
    NEG be [PAST-HABIT] any nurses the time DEMON in-it
    'There were no nurses in those days.'\textsuperscript{gbr152}

b. Ni raibh aon chóracha taistil an uair sin ann
    NEG be [PAST] any provisions travel [GEN] the time DEMON in-it
    'There was no public transport in those days.' \textsuperscript{al19}

c. Dúirt sé go raibh feirmeoir uair ann
    say [PAST] he c. be [PAST] farmer time in-it
    'He said that there was once a farmer.' \textsuperscript{gbr144}

So the Definiteness Restriction bifurcates:

A: A ban on strong quantifiers in existential structures, which is insensitive to the syntactic prominence of the pivot.
B: A distinction between definite and indefinite descriptions, which is sensitive to the syntactic prominence of the pivot, in that only low \( dp \)'s are required to be indefinite.

The Two Positions—A Final Puzzle

(44) a. Tá muid seisear ann.
    be [PRES] we six-people in-it
    'We are six./There are six of us.'

b. Bhí siad scaife mór ann.
    be [PAST] they crowd big in-it
    'There was a big crowd of them.'
References


