Introduction

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1 Preliminary remarks

This book grew out of a conference on Comparative Celtic Syntax held at the University of Wales, Bangor, on 25–7 June 1992. Earlier versions of seven of the ten chapters collected here were given at that conference. The idea behind the conference was to bring together researchers working on the syntax of the Celtic languages from a ‘principles-and-parameters’ perspective (the assumptions behind this perspective are outlined below in section 2.1), and, in particular, to provide a forum where comparative work on Celtic syntax could be presented. The comparative work was intended to be both internal and external to the Celtic family. Hence, one goal of the conference was to encourage those working on Celtic to make comparisons with non-Celtic languages, and to bring relevant phenomena and analyses of Celtic languages to the attention of those working on non-Celtic languages. Although the precise contents differ from the conference, and this volume should not be taken as a conference proceedings, we have compiled this collection with the same general goals in mind.

This introduction is intended to provide the background to the chapters that follow, both for those who are unfamiliar with the principles-and-parameters framework and for those who are unfamiliar with the Celtic languages. In this section, we briefly sketch the historical, geographical and social situation of the languages. Section 2 provides background to the principles-and-parameters framework. This section is of most relevance for readers who may be familiar with the languages but who are less familiar with this framework. Sections 3 and 4 then discuss a number of aspects of the syntax of Celtic that are of particular interest from a principles-and-parameters perspective, either for general theoretical reasons or because of the comparative interest of the particular Celtic phenomena in relation to other languages. These sections are of most relevance to readers who are familiar with work on other languages in the principles-and-parameters framework, but who are less familiar with the Celtic languages. Of course, none of these introductory sections is exhaustive: a complete introduction to the syntactic framework is given in Haegeman (1994), and fuller discussions of Celtic syntax are provided in the chapters themselves, as well as in the collections in Hendrick (1990b) and the special issue of Natural Language and Linguistic Theory devoted
The Celtic languages are a subgroup of Indo-European. Certain morphological similarities have led to the suggestion that Celtic and Italic form a common subgroup, although this view is no longer widely held. The Celtic languages are grouped together on the basis of shared innovations with respect to Indo-European, such as the absence of a reflex of Indo-European *p in initial and medial positions (cf. Irish *aithair ‘father’ vs. Latin *pater, English *father, etc.), a number of which are not found elsewhere in the family. Within Celtic, the basic division is between Continental and Insular Celtic.

Continental Celtic refers to the languages spoken by the Celts in continental Europe between roughly 500BC and 500AD. These languages are only known through Latin and Greek versions of proper names, and a small number of inscriptions from France and northern Italy. The principal Continental Celtic languages were Gaulish, Celtiberian and Lepontic. Since, given the nature of the attested evidence, very little can be known about the syntax of these languages, they are not mentioned in any of the chapters in this collection.

Insular Celtic refers to the Celtic languages that are historically rooted in the British Isles (including Breton, which is the result of fifth- and sixth-century migrations from Cornwall). These languages are divided into two groups: Brythonic (or Brittonic or British) and Goidelic (or Gaelic). The principal distinguishing feature of the two groups is the reflex of Indo-European *kʷ, which in Brythonic gives p and in Goidelic gives k: for example, Welsh *pump (‘five’) corresponds to Irish *cóc (cf. Latin *quinque). For this reason, the two branches are sometimes referred to as ‘P-Celtic’ and ‘Q-Celtic’ respectively (the term ‘Q-Celtic’ originates from the Latin transliteration of the Ogam symbol for /ku/). There are six Insular Celtic languages: three Goidelic and three Brythonic: the three Goidelic languages are Irish, Manx and Scots Gaelic; the three Brythonic ones are Breton, Cornish and Welsh. Of these six languages, Cornish and Manx are no longer spoken. The remaining four languages are the only ones that still have native speakers, and these are the only ones that are discussed in this volume. We will now briefly sketch the historical, geographical and social situation of each one. For more details, see the respective chapters of MacAulay (1992).

Irish, as the official first language of the Republic of Ireland, is the only Celtic language to be a national standard. It is not known when the Celts migrated to Ireland, but they were certainly there in Classical times. The earliest attestations of Insular Celtic are the forms of Irish recorded in the indigenous Ogam script (approximately 300–500). Old Irish (600–900) provides the oldest body of literary texts in Celtic. Until the consolidation of colonial English power and the transplantation of English-speaking migrants to Ireland in the seventeenth century, Irish was the language of essentially the whole island of Ireland. From
the beginning of the colonial period, Irish declined. In 1851, at the first census which asked about language, only 23 per cent of the population were Irish-speaking. At present, between 30,000 and 70,000 native speakers of Irish remain (estimates vary), scattered in small communities in the extreme west of the country.

Scots Gaelic was imported into Scotland from Ireland some time before the fifth century AD. It has always been linguistically very close to Irish, especially to the Ulster dialects, and until the seventeenth century the written language was essentially Irish. It has never been the language of the whole of Scotland: Pictish was spoken in Classical times, although it was eventually replaced by Gaelic. Brythonic languages were also spoken in the south until roughly the eleventh century. A northern dialect of English has been spoken in the south-east, around Edinburgh, for over a thousand years. The last few centuries have seen a steady retreat of Gaelic to the north and west, aided by official policy from the seventeenth century to the twentieth. The number of speakers has diminished from about 300,000 in 1800 to about 80,000 in 1981. The largest proportion of these speakers is in the Western Isles. The local authority in this area has an official bilingual policy, and there is some bilingual education.

Breton was, as mentioned above, imported into north-western France from Cornwall around the fifth and sixth centuries. Although Brittany was largely politically independent until it was absorbed into France in 1532, the ruling classes were probably French-speaking much earlier. The earliest connected Breton texts date from the fifteenth century, and the orthography was standardized in the early nineteenth century. Until 1951 Breton was prohibited in schools, and children were punished if they were heard speaking it. The traditionally recognized linguistic frontier separating Breton from French runs across the peninsula from St Brieuc in the north to Vannes in the south. West of this line, Breton is spoken in rural communities, particularly inland. No statistical evidence is available about Breton, since it has no official status within the French Republic. Estimates of the number of speakers vary from 400,000 to 600,000, though all agree that the figure is declining rapidly.

Welsh is the linguistic survivor of the Anglo-Saxon invasions of the main island of Britain, which began in the fifth century AD. Because its immediate ancestor was spoken throughout England during the period of Roman administration (43–405), Welsh contains a large number of Latin loan words. The period from the fifth to the seventeenth century was one of steady Anglo-Saxon encroachment westwards. Old Welsh is attested from the eighth century, by which time the language was confined to Wales, having been separated from Cornish in the south in the sixth century. Wales ceased to be an independent country in 1288, and lost all political autonomy with the Act of Union in 1536. However, the form of Modern Literary Welsh was fixed by the Bible translation of 1588. The Methodist revival of the eighteenth century arguably saved Welsh, spreading both literacy
and liturgy in the language. Until the industrial revolution, almost all of Wales was wholly Welsh-speaking. In 1921, 37.1 per cent of the total population was Welsh-speaking; this had declined to 18.9 per cent by 1981 (a total of 503,549 people). Since 1967, the language has had official status throughout Wales. Bilingual schools are found everywhere, and there has been a Welsh television station since the 1980s. Although its long-term future is far from secure, Welsh appears to be the most firmly established and widely spoken Celtic language at present.

This concludes our brief overview of the languages that are discussed here. In the next section, we turn to more theoretical questions, providing a sketch of the basic assumptions about syntactic theory that are common to the chapters collected here.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Principles and parameters

All the contributions to this volume assume the ‘principles-and-parameters’ approach as the framework for the study of comparative syntax. Here we very briefly describe what that approach involves. In the present context, we cannot give a full introduction; for a full discussion and illustration of the concept of a parameter of Universal Grammar, see the introduction to Jaeggli and Safir (1989), and for a general introduction to the principles and parameters approach, see Haegeman (1994).

Chomsky was the originator of the notion of Universal Grammar in the context of modern linguistics (see in particular Chomsky 1975, 1980, 1986a, 1988 for a fuller discussion and defence of this idea). Universal Grammar (UG) consists of an invariant core of constitutive principles which are common to all possible human languages. These principles are innately given: that is, they form part of the human genetic endowment. In order to account for the attested variation among the world’s languages, these principles are associated with parameters of variation which make it possible for a principle to be realized in different ways in different languages. Since the principles of UG are fairly abstract in nature, a minimal difference in the value of an associated parameter in two different languages may give rise to dramatic surface differences in the well-formed sentences of the languages. In this way, the principles-and-parameters approach is able to account for the differences among languages while maintaining the idea that all languages are cut from the same cloth.

An example of the interaction of principles and parameters comes from certain well-known differences between French and English regarding the position of the inflected main verb in finite clauses (see Emonds 1978; Pollock 1989). It was
originally argued by Emonds (1978) that French has a rule moving finite verbs out of VP, while English does not. The basic form of the observation is as follows: there is a class of elements X that can be plausibly regarded as positioned on the left edge of VP. These elements include VP-adverbs, clausal negation and floated quantifiers. In French, finite main verbs must precede X, while English main verbs always follow X. The relevant paradigms are as follows:

(1) **Adverb**
   a. Jean *embrasse souvent* Marie.
      *Jean *souvent* embrasse Marie.
   b. *John kisses often* Mary.
      John *often kisses* Mary.

(2) **Negation**
   a. Jean (ne) *mange pas* du chocolat.
      *Jean (ne) pas mange* du chocolat.
   b. *John eats not* chocolate.
      John does *not eat* chocolate.

(3) **Floated quantifiers**
   a. Les enfants *mangent tous* le chocolat.
      *Les enfants tous mangent* le chocolat.
   b. *The children eat all* chocolate.
      The children *all eat* chocolate.

The evidence clearly shows that finite verbs are in different positions in the two languages. The alternative is to suggest that the X-elements differ between the two languages (this has been suggested by Williams 1994). The usual account of these differences is that French verbs move to I (for Inflection), a node comparable to the Aux node of early transformational work which contains features of tense, agreement, etc. in a tree structure such as the following (see the discussion of clause structure in section 2.2):
Here, the V-to-I rule places the finite verb in a position preceding X. The operation of this rule in French thus derives the orders seen in (1)–(3) above, and its non-operation in English derives the English orders seen in those examples.

Standard assumptions about subject–verb inversion deriving from the seminal work of den Besten (1983) treat this operation as involving movement of I to C. Given the Head Movement Constraint (see Travis 1984; Baker 1988; and section 2.4 below), V cannot move directly to C, and so inversion of main verbs depends on the prior operation of V-to-I movement to feed it. Thus we find that French main verbs are able to undergo inversion (subject to the independent restriction that the subject be a clitic – see Rizzi and Roberts 1989), while English main verbs are unable to do so:

(5) a. Voit-il le cheval?
   b. *Sees he the horse?

The contrast in (4) is further evidence that French main verbs move to I while their English counterparts do not.  

Chomsky (1993) proposes that the relevant parameter concerns the value of an abstract morphological feature that licenses verbs, and is associated with I. This feature is called I’s V-feature. In Chomsky’s system, such features are generated both on V and on I, and must be cancelled out by a checking operation prior to LF since they have no semantic content and will thus violate the Principle of Full Interpretation, which applies at LF, unless eliminated. The feature varies parametrically as either strong or weak. If it is strong, it is visible to the PF component, and hence must be eliminated prior to the mapping to that level of representation, that is, prior to S-structure. Since feature-checking takes place in a highly local domain, V must move to I in order for feature-checking to take place. Thus where the V-feature is strong, V raises overtly to I. Where the feature is
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weak, the Procrastinate Principle, which delays movement to the covert, post-Spell-Out part of the grammar wherever possible, prevents this movement from taking place overtly. In these terms, then, the UG principle is that V-features must be checked, and the parametric variation consists in French I having a strong V-feature and English I a weak V-feature.

This outline of the basic ideas of the principles-and-parameters approach to cross-linguistic variation and typology, although extremely sketchy and simplified, is enough for our purposes here. One important facet of this approach is that it makes it possible in principle to isolate structural isomorphisms among unrelated languages: that is, we expect to find interesting similarities between languages with no historical or other connection. This can be attributed to their choosing the same parameter settings in a given domain. In this way, very enlightening and unexpected comparisons become possible. The present volume offers two such instances: the similarities between Celtic languages and Semitic languages in the nature of pronouns and word order studied by Roberts and Shlonsky, and the ‘long head movement’ construction shared between Breton and various Slavonic and Romance languages studied by Borsley, Rivero and Stephens. Duffield’s article also brings out similarities among Irish, Hebrew and Maltese.

We now have a notion of how current theory accounts for syntactic differences and similarities between languages. The principles-and-parameters approach was designed to account for synchronic variation, and, as the chapters presented here attest for the case of a relatively little-studied and somewhat ‘exotic’ language family, it provides the right kind of restricted yet flexible analytic framework for this.

2.2 Clause structure and functional categories

Most of the work contained in this volume takes its fundamental impetus from the recent upsurge of research on clause structure. The current interest in clause structure revolves around a hypothesized system of non-lexical categories which carry essentially ‘morphological’ information: the functional categories. This work was stimulated initially by Chomsky (1986b), and the approach was further developed by Pollock (1989) and Chomsky (1991, 1993). Work on functional categories inside nominals has also been very important; we will discuss this in section 2.3.

The X-bar schema gives the internal structure of syntactic categories.\(^3\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(6)} & \quad \text{a. } XP & \rightarrow & \text{YP X'} \\
& \quad \text{b. } X' & \rightarrow & X \text{ ZP}
\end{align*}
\]
Originally this schema was taken to apply only to the lexical categories N, V, A and P. It was assumed that the `clausal' categories S and S' were generated by the following PS-rules:

(7)  
a. \( S' \rightarrow \text{COMP} \ S \) 
b. \( S \rightarrow \text{NP} \ \text{Aux} \ \text{VP} \)

This was clearly an undesirable state of affairs given the general programme, initiated by Chomsky (1981) and Stowell (1981), for the elimination of independent PS-rules from the theory. Accordingly, Chomsky (1986b) proposed that S and S' are projections of the non-lexical categories I(nfl) and C(omp), respectively. As we mentioned above, I corresponds roughly to the Aux node of earlier work, and contains in particular features specifying tense and agreement; this position had originally been argued to be the head of S in Hale, Jeanne and Platero (1977). In the system of Chomsky (1986b), the specifier of I is the subject position, and the complement of I is VP. C is the earlier COMP position; its specifier is the landing site for wh-movement and (in verb-second languages – see below) fronted topics, and its complement is IP. So we have the following clause structure:

(8)

Here CP and IP are functional categories, and together make up what is sometimes called the `functional domain' of the clause. All the chapters in this volume assume some version of the structure in (8), frequently with further elaboration.

One important result of Pollock's (1989) work on verb movement in English and French is the `split-Infl' hypothesis. The initial evidence for this comes from the behaviour of French infinitives. First, Pollock observes that French infinitives show the same split between auxiliaries and main verbs as English finite verbs, in that only the auxiliaries être and avoir can move over the negative pas (see Emonds' (1978) rule of have/be raising which applies in English finite clauses):

(9)  
a. N'être pas content est une condition pour écrire.
   `To be not happy is a condition for writing.'
   b. *Ne semblir pas content . . .
   `To seem not happy . . .'
However, the situation regarding the placement of main-verb infinitives in relation to adverbs is more complex. While infinitives cannot raise over negation, they can precede some adverbs, for instance:

(10) a. **A peine parler** l’italien après cinq ans d’étude . . .
    hardly to-speak Italian after five years of study . . .

b. **Parler à peine** l’italien après cinq ans d’étude . . .

Pollock is led to propose a ‘short’ movement of main-verb infinitives. Following the Structure Preservation Condition of Chomsky (1986b), the landing-site of this movement must be a head. Pollock capitalizes on the fact that I node of Chomsky (1986b) was a rather unnatural combination of the features of Tense (T) and Agreement (Agr), and proposes that these two kinds of features should each project their own X-bar structure. This gives the two separate functional projections TP and AgrP. The ‘short’ movement of main-verb infinitives in French is then seen as movement to the lower of these two heads, while the longer movement of tensed main verbs in French is to the higher of these heads. Pollock assumed that TP dominates AgrP, so this gives the following clause structure:

(11)

Pollock’s ‘split-Infl’ hypothesis has given rise to a vast amount of work on basic clause structure and functional categories. Almost any property that can be reasonably ascribed to an auxiliary system – Aspect, Modality, Negation, Voice, etc. – has been associated with its own functional category. Thus, just as it is unclear what the inventory of ‘possible auxiliary notions’ is, it is unclear what the full inventory of functional categories might be. It would be impossible here to outline all the proposals for clause structure and functional categories that have been made in the past few years. However, two elaborations of Pollock’s system are worthy of particular note and so we briefly discuss them here.

Belletti (1990) argues that AgrP should be taken to dominate TP, apparently the inverse of Pollock’s split-Infl structure. Chomsky (1991) elaborates Belletti’s proposal further by suggesting that there are separate functional projections for subject and object agreement: there is an Agr-projection above T which is the
position of affixes specifying agreement with the subject, or AgrS, and there is also an Agr-projection below TP, the position for agreement with the object, AgrO (see Kayne 1989a). The structure of the clause is thus as in (12):

\[
\text{(12) CP} \quad \text{Spec} \quad \text{AgrSP} \quad \text{Spec} \quad \text{AgrS'} \quad \text{Spec} \quad \text{AgrO'} \quad \text{Spec} \quad \text{TP} \quad \text{T} \quad \text{AgrOP} \quad \text{Spec} \quad \text{AgrO} \quad \text{Spec} \quad \text{VP} \quad \text{V'}
\]

Most current work assumes this, usually with further functional projections for Negation and, frequently, a further projection between C and AgrS.

The above paragraphs have been concerned mainly with verb movement within IP, and consequently have not addressed the analysis of inversion constructions, i.e. constructions in which the verb moves over the subject. The most prominent type of construction where the verb appears to regularly move out of IP is the verb-second phenomenon, found in all Germanic languages (except for contemporary English). The verb-second (or V2) construction features movement of the finite verb coupled with fronting of some XP. The precise nature of XP is immaterial; it may be the subject, a complement or an adverbial element. The following German sentences (from Tomaselli 1989), illustrate the phenomenon:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(13)} & \\
& \text{a. Ich las schon letztes Jahr diesen Roman.} \\
& \text{I read already last year this book} \\
& \text{b. Ich habe schon letztes Jahr diesen Roman gelesen.} \\
& \text{I have already last year this book read}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(14)} & \\
& \text{a. Diesen Roman las ich schon letztes Jahr.} \\
& \text{this book I read already last year} \\
& \text{b. Diesen Roman habe ich schon letztes Jahr gelesen.} \\
& \text{this book I have already last year read}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(15)} & \\
& \text{a. Schon letztes Jahr las ich diesen Roman.} \\
& \text{already last year I read this book} \\
& \text{b. Schon letztes Jahr habe ich diesen Roman gelesen.} \\
& \text{already last year I have this book read}
\end{align*}
\]