Nominative subjects of non-finite clauses in Hiberno-English

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Hiberno-English (Irish English) dialects have developed an innovative grammatical pattern where the pronominal subject of an embedded gerund clause is marked with nominative instead of accusative or genitive case. This paper traces the use of this structure in older forms of Hiberno-English and contrasts it with corresponding patterns in Standard English and in Irish. It is argued that the development of the pattern is indirectly due to structural transfer from Irish, although superficially the resulting distribution of nominative and accusative pronoun forms in Hiberno-English differs crucially from that in both the substrate and the superstrate language.

1. Introduction[1]

The language contact situation between Irish and English in Ireland has long been recognised as a veritable hotbed of contact-induced language change phenomena. Starting in the 17th and culminating in the mid-19th century, a situation of migration, societal bilingualism and subsequent mass language shift have led to the emergence of a set of highly divergent dialects of English which show very marked traces of influence from the Irish substrate (Filppula 1999, Hickey ed. 2005). Given the intensity of the contact, it is not surprising that these effects have permeated virtually all domains of linguistic organisation, from discourse through phonology and grammar.

According to Matras (this vol.), clause-combining strategies, such as complementation constructions, appear to be a domain particularly susceptible to contact-induced change. As Matras notes, such convergence effects need not involve actual borrowing of formal material, but may also happen through a replication of more abstract properties of the constructions involved, or in his words, a "fusion" of rules of form-function mapping. It will be one effect of this kind that will form the focus of this paper.

One of the means of coding inter-clausal connectivity employed prominently by English is the use of non-finite verb forms (infinitives, gerunds and participles) in subordinate clauses. As in many other languages, the use of non-finite clauses in Eng-

lish involves not only a special morphological coding of the verb, but in many instances a re-organisation of the basic clausal architecture as a whole, especially with respect to the licensing and case marking of nominal arguments of the verb. This is a feature that English shares – although with characteristic differences in detail – with its neighboring and contact language, Irish.

Certain forms of Hiberno-English dialects seem to have diverged from Standard English in a way that may strike the observer as surprising. While in Standard English, subject arguments of gerund clauses are coded exclusively as either genitives or accusatives, Hiberno-English instead allows nominative-marked subjects in this position, as shown in the 19th-century attestation in (1):

(1) My sister Bridget stopped with her old missus <u>after I</u> leaving [Normil04, 1855]

Although there is a considerable amount of literature on the grammar of Hiberno-English, and on the question of possible contact-related influences on it, this phenomenon has so far not featured prominently in the discussion. If at all, it has usually been mentioned only in passing, in connection with the somewhat better-known issue of the subordinating use of *and* (see Section 2.2.2 below). However, the issue of non-finite nominative subject (henceforth NNS) constructions is interesting in its own right, and it has ramifications well beyond the subordinating *and* cases.

In this article, I will provide a contrastive analysis of the relevant aspects of the grammars of Irish, Standard English, and Hiberno-English, focussing first on the morphological system of case-marking, and then on the syntactic structures encountered in non-finite clauses. In doing so, I will also provide a first descriptive outline documenting NNS constructions in older forms of Hiberno-English, based on data from a corpus of subliterary 18th and 19th century texts.[2] In conclusion, I shall then sketch out a scenario of how the NNS constructions may have developed in Hiberno-English. I will argue that the use of nominative pronouns is not explainable in a straightforward way as a simple transfer feature from Irish, because (at least at first sight) it would seem that the corresponding structures in Irish should, if anything, have reinforced the use of accusative pronouns in these positions, as they are used in many other present-day varieties of English. I will then argue, on the other hand, that transfer of a rather more subtle kind did take place after all: it proceeded not from a simple equivalence relation between surface grammatical forms of the two languages, but rather from more abstract properties of the constructional frames in which these forms appear. This abstract, indirect transfer seems to have led to a rather paradoxical result, insofar as it has led to a surface distribution of forms that differs crucially both from Standard English and from Irish.

2. English and Irish in contrast

English and Irish, while differing sharply from each other in their general typological characteristics in many important ways, nevertheless share a good deal of common ground in the use of non-finite verb forms in embedded clauses. A central role in Irish grammar is played by the verbal noun (VN). Besides being used in a periphrastic construction to mark a progressive, it corresponds in many of its other uses to either an English gerund or a *to*-infinitive. While there is a great deal of functional overlap between these categories in both languages, both of them also display a fair amount of internal variation in their use. It is with respect to one aspect of this variation that I will compare the grammars of the two languages in this paper: the question of case-marking and syntactic licensing of overt subject arguments of the gerund/verbal-noun clauses.

2.1 The case systems of English and Irish

The apparent paradox which one needs to face in attempting a contact-related explanation of the Hiberno-English NNS constructions lies in the fact that Irish, in the corresponding positions of non-finite constructions, uses forms that are often identified as accusative (object), not nominative (subject) forms. Hence, one might be led to expect that any Irish influence on Hiberno-English should re-inforce the use of accusatives rather than support the innovation of nominatives in these positions. The identification of the relevant Irish forms as accusatives is, however, based on the assumption of a fundamental equivalence between the relevant domains of English and Irish morphology. In order to show that this identification is indeed mistaken (cf. Genee 1998: 15), it is necessary to give a brief analysis of the case systems of both languages.

As is well known, English lacks a nominative-accusative case distinction in lexical nouns and in most pronouns, retaining only the genitive as an overtly marked case,[3] contrasting with a common or default case. Beyond this distinction, it has preserved a nominative-accusative contrast only in the closed set of personal pronoun forms *I/me, he/him, she/her, we/us, they/them* (and marginally *who/whom*). However, this contrast does not follow the functional pattern of a typical nominative-accusative distinction everywhere either, namely that of marking subjects and objects/complements respectively. There has been a rather strong tendency, in many modern varieties of English, to introduce seemingly accusative forms into traditionally nominative environments, especially in those that differ markedly from the prototypical subject position, which is immediately preverbal, topical, and unstressed. Sentences such as *me and John are going* or *it's me* illustrate this tendency, which may be interpreted as a trend towards reanalysing the accusative forms into strong and the nominative forms into weak pronouns. It should be noted that in most environments where accusative forms encroach on traditionally nominative territory, they bear focus and are often phonologically stressed.

Irish, too, rather like English, lacks a nominative-accusative case distinction in lexical nouns and in most pronouns. There exists, however, a formal contrast, restrict-

ed to third person pronouns. This contrast, which has traditionally often been described as one of nominative vs. accusative case, is today treated in the more neutral terms of 'conjunct' vs. 'disjunct' forms by most descriptive grammars of Irish (following Bráithre Críostaí 1960). However, modern discussions in the generative framework, based on the assumption of a universal repertoire of 'structural cases', have continued to discuss it in terms of nominative and accusative. When seen under this perspective, there is a perceived mismatch in 'case' usage between Hiberno-English and Irish in the environments in question here.

The disjunct (or 'accusative') form of Irish is morphologically unmarked and (for the most part) historically older. The conjunct form (or 'nominative') is created fairly transparently from the disjunct by the addition of a prefixed element *s-*. Both disjunct and conjunct forms can be further expanded by another suffix to yield an emphatic, contrastive form:

Table 1. Pronoun forms in Irish

	disjunct	conjunct	disj. contr.	conj. contr.
Sg. Masc.	é	sé	eisean	seisean
Sg. Fem.	í	sí	ise	sise
Pl. (M/F)	iad	siad	iadsan	siadsan

The conjunct forms are used exclusively in the immediately post-verbal subject position of finite lexical verbs (Bráithre Críostaí 1960: 138). The disjunct forms are used everywhere else: as objects of finite verbs, as subjects and predicates in copula clauses (which in Irish have a syntax very different from that of normal verbs); in non-finite clauses; and also as parts of syntactically complex subject NPs after finite verbs, for instance as the second of two co-ordinated subjects. It is the contrast between the use of conjunct forms as finite subjects and disjunct forms as finite objects that provides the obvious grounds for their traditional identification as, respectively, nominative and accusative 'case' forms. However, the additional use of the disjunct forms in so many other environments, especially in what are clearly subject positions in copula clauses, fairly strongly suggest that their identification as accusative/object-case forms is misleading. It should be noted that the apparent mismatch between subject syntactic position and seemingly 'object-case' form cannot be motivated along the same lines as in the English examples of the *it's me* type: the disjunct/object forms display no signs of being 'strong' pronouns, since they tend to be just as unstressed as their conjunct counterparts; and both stand in the same formal opposition to the extra set of emphatic pronouns, which are obligatorily used whenever emphasis is required.

Thus, the obvious analysis is to say that the disjunct forms are an unmarked default form, neutral with respect to structural case assignment. The conjunct forms, in contrast, are only a surface morphological variant, conditioned, like clitics, under con-

ditions of linear adjacency to the finite verb (for a similar argument, see Carnie 1995: 160f.).[4] This analysis also happens to fit the diachronic facts better, since the conjunct/disjunct contrast is not historically a reflex of inherited case morphology, as it is in English, but rather a fairly recent innovation (Pedersen 1913: § 491): the disjunct pronouns are a continuation of a single, unified paradigm of common-case pronouns that existed in older forms of the language, while the conjunct forms represent an innovation that has happened in Irish but not even in the very closely related sister language Scottish Gaelic.

Summing up, we may characterise the relations between the pairs of forms involved in Irish and in English in terms of their markedness relations, which in some sense are just the reverse of each other. Whereas in English, the structural markedness relation between the two forms can be analysed, fairly straightforwardly, as the accusatives being the marked forms (notwithstanding the fact that they today appear in a greater range of positions, because that is arguably motivated by independent factors such as their emergent function as strong pronouns), it seems to be exactly the reverse in Irish: here, the form that happens to be used in object (and other) positions is clearly the unmarked, default form, and the one that happens to be used in (most) subject positions is a special, marked form. I will argue below that it is mainly this markedness relation, and not the superficial equivalence between seemingly subject and object forms, that became decisive in the mapping of correspondence relations between forms in both languages, during the syntactic transfer processes that led to the emergence of the nominative usage in non-finite clauses in Hiberno-English.

2.2   Subject marking in English '–ing' clauses

2.2.1   *Standard English*

In order to explain the contact processes in Hiberno-English, we first need to provide a broad sketch of the development of subject marking in mainstream English *-ing* clauses. In doing so, it will be useful to distinguish the following types of constructions (2): gerund clauses that stand in object or complement position within the matrix clause, i.e. those that are outwardly governed by either a verb or a preposition (2a); gerund clauses in subject position, where such a governing element is not present (2b); so-called absolute constructions, which have the function of (usual causal) adverbials (2c); and finally the special type of so-called subordinating-*and* clause, which is found in certain non-standard dialects of English (2d).

(2) a.   I hate [[John's/his/John/him] being late]
    b.   [[John's/his/John/him] being late] was bad news for all of us.
    c.   [[John/him/he] being late], I decided not to wait longer.
    d.   Why should we keep waiting, [and [John/him/he] being late again]!

As is well known, in clauses of the types (2a–b) the historically older option of genitive marking alternates with the more modern option of accusative/common-case mark-

ing in Present-Day English. While the genitive is structurally motivated by the original nominal properties of the gerund, the innovative use of the accusative can be regarded as a sign of the gradual strengthening of the verbal properties of this category in English (Fanego 1998, 2004a). In contrast to this, the absolute constructions of the type in (2c) and apparently also those of (2d) have a different origin. Here, the original case was the nominative ("nominative absolute"), and the verb forms in these clauses were clearly participles, not gerunds, displaying no signs of noun-like syntactic behaviour.

For the intrusion of non-genitive forms in the types (2a–b), Fanego (2004a) describes two unrelated, distinct sources. Non-genitive forms in environments like (2a) developed via reanalysis from instances that were morphologically ambiguous between accusative/common case and genitive case. As relevant cases Fanego (2004a: 43) mentions: the lexical class of Middle English uninflected genitive singulars, nouns ending in -s, plural nouns in general, and the pronoun *her.* This reanalysis was clearly structurally motivated by the presence of potentially accusative-assigning governing elements adjacent to these subject positions in the matrix clause, i.e. the governing verbs or prepositions. In terms of formal grammar, the mechanism licensing the innovative accusative case forms can therefore plausibly be characterised as one of 'exceptional case-marking' (ECM).

In contrast to this, the non-genitive forms in sentence-initial (subject-clause) positions such as (2b) arose mainly through an extension of the superficially similar nominative-absolute type (2c). Accordingly, it is first found with common-case lexical nouns but not with unambiguously accusative pronouns.

Examples of non-genitives in type (2a) can be found, though at first very rarely, from Middle English onwards (Fanego 2004a: 10; cf. also Fanego 2004b). Quoting Tajima (1996), Fanego provides some early examples from c.1400 both with common-case lexical nouns and with unambiguously accusative pronouns in such environments, but she also notes that the latter remained much more infrequent than the former throughout Early Modern English (2004a: 8f.). Overt accusatives became reasonably common only during Late Modern English, roughly from the 18th century onwards (2004a: 43). As for structures of type (2b), Fanego's earliest quoted examples are from the 17th century (2004a: 44). Unambiguous accusative pronouns in these positions seem at first to be excluded and are attested only much later, in the early 20th century. In their stead, some early examples attest to the occasional use of nominatives, as in (3). Note the great semantic similarity between this use of a gerund subject clause as a causal subject with *make,* and the causal use of a nominative absolute:

(3)   I having a great esteem for your honour […], makes me acquaint you of an affair that I hope will oblige you to know. [From the *Spectator,* 1711–1712, quoted in Fanego (2004a: 45) after Jespersen (1961–1970: V, §§ 9.8.3)]

Unlike these structures, gerunds in non-initial (object/complement) positions like (2a) seem never to have been used with nominative subjects during the development of mainstream English, a fact that accords well with their status as ECM structures.

This makes the later appearance of nominatives in just these environments in Hiberno-English appear all the more striking.

As for the late spread of overtly accusative forms into the sentence-initial clauses in mainstream English, it can apparently be seen in conjunction with the general spread of accusative pronouns into other nominative environments, including those of the *John and me* type and also those of the absolute construction (2c) itself.

Summing up, we can recognise the combined effects of three interrelated processes in the development of non-finite subject case marking in Standard English -*ing* clauses: the development of 'exceptional case-marking' as a mechanism motivating overt accusatives in environments governed by a case-assigning matrix element; the emancipation of sentence-initial gerund clauses (with a subject position not overtly governed by a matrix case assigner, and therefore allowing only for common-case lexical nouns as subjects); and finally the generalisation of formally accusative pronouns as strong pronouns, intruding into various syntactic positions, at last including those in the sentence-initial gerund clauses.

2.2.2   *Subordinating 'and'*

Before we turn to the use of nominatives in the Hiberno-English equivalents of clauses of the type in (2a), we should first give some consideration to the special type of adjunct clauses introduced by *and,* as in (2d) above. The term "subordinating *and*" is here understood as referring to clause-level constructions that are marked by the lack of a finite verb as being dependent clauses, but nevertheless linked by *and* with a finite matrix clause. This structure plays an important role in Hiberno-English and has attracted somewhat more attention in the literature than the other types under discussion here (Ó Siadhail 1984: 132–134; Häcker 1999; Filppula 1999: 200; Corrigan 2000). Subordinating *and* occurs both with -*ing* or -*en* participles, and with verbless predicate clauses. There has been some discussion about the subordinating function of *and* found in this construction, about its semantics, and whether it was a feature of older forms of English outside Ireland.

Corrigan (2000: 77) attempts to trace the history of the construction as far back as Old English. However, the evidence she cites from the early periods only concerns construction types with *finite* subordinated clauses, and Corrigan provides no argument to support her implicit suggestion that these types are in any way historically related to the non-finite type at issue here. Filppula (1991) finds some seemingly more pertinent examples in Early Modern English texts between 1500 and 1710, but even this list does not convincingly prove a special role of *and* as a subordinator in a specialised construction type, since most of the examples can be analysed simply as absolute constructions of the type (2c) that are coordinated among each other, as in (4):

(4)   all physitians having given him over and he lying drawing his last breath there came an old woman unto him. [1635, quoted in Filppula 1991: 624]

It seems, in short, that the role of subordinating *and* in Standard English and in its older forms has sometimes been over-stated in the literature. If anything, subordinating *and* with non-finite clauses was quite marginal in Early Modern English and emergent Standard Modern English. However, evidence of comparable structures is more solid in certain forms of dialectal English. Häcker gives some northern Middle English and Older Scots examples, such as (5):

(5)   Lorde,... I thank the... that thou to daie hase giuene me grace Almous to take... Off thaim that was wont to be myne awne menne and seruid me, And i vnknawen vnto thaim
'... at a time when I was unknown to them' [Häcker 1999: 42]

Ó Siadhail (1984: 133–134) quotes plausible examples from literary representations of the 19th-century spoken vernacular of Warwickshire in the English Midlands, taken from novels by George Eliot. Similar examples from late 19th-century Lincolnshire are quoted by Häcker:

(6)   I thought then and I think now, it fell strange and hard on her, <u>and her</u> nobbut seventeen [Häcker 1999: 42]

The most solid evidence, according to Häcker, comes from modern Scottish varieties, both from the varieties of the Highlands and western islands (where English has been or used to be in contact with Gaelic until very recently), and from Lowlands Scots. Finally, Quirk et al. (1985: § 11.44) recognise the construction, in its verbless form, as a feature even of Standard Present-Day English, but describe it as a marginal type of "irregular sentence", a formal idiom that is in some sense extraneous to regular clausal syntax:

(7) a.   How could you be so spiteful <u>and her</u> your best friend?
    b.   They left without a word, <u>and he</u> so sensitive.

While Quirk et al. recognise both the use type with the accusative and, "less commonly", that with the nominative, the picture that emerges with respect to case usage in the older varieties is as follows: The oldest attestations, from Middle English, Early Modern English and literary early 19th-century Scots, invariably have nominative marking, and are in this respect formally identical to nominative absolutes. Later examples from British varieties, especially from more colloquial, dialectal forms, mostly have accusative marking. This is also generally true for modern Scots. Häcker (1999: 43) plausibly interprets this as a diachronic development; it seems to be yet another manifestation of the overall trend for accusative pronouns to encroach on nominative domains and to take on strong-pronoun functions.

As for the Irish varieties, the picture is mixed. Ó Siadhail (1984: 131–132) provides evidence of a preference for the nominative in data from the southern Irish counties of Clare (Munster), and Carlow and Wicklow (Leinster), the nominative being used in all of six examples cited by him. Likewise, Filppula (1999: 200) finds only nominative marking in his data from Clare, Kerry, Wicklow and Dublin, all in the south. In con-

trast to this, Henry (1957: 206) reports that in the more northern county of Roscommon (Connacht) both cases were used. Finally, Corrigan (2000: 87) finds an exclusive use of the accusative in her data from Armagh (Ulster), likewise in the north. This suggests that there is a geographical north-south divide across Ireland, with the northern varieties siding with the British dialects whereas the southern ones have developed a new, specialised use of the nominative.

This north-south divide apparently corresponds with a semantic innovation also found mainly in the south of Ireland (Corrigan 2000: 79). The structures attested in Standard English, those from the modern northern British dialects, and also most of those found in the northern parts of Ireland, all have a narrow, pragmatically specialised function, which – following Filppula – we may call the "exclamative" use type. These sentences express concessive or causal meanings, and are used emphatically to signal a stance of personal emotional involvement, such as reproach or regret, as in the examples (6) and (7) above or in the following example (8):

(8)   he is never in work and when he was he give Me nothing *&* <u>him</u> nicely in health
[Doorle07, 1905]

In contrast to this, southern Hiberno-English uses subordinating *and* in a more neutral fashion, expressing purely temporal relations (9):

(9) a.   I only thought of him there <u>and I cooking</u> my dinner
('...while I was cooking …') [Häcker 1999:38, quoting Filppula 1991: 618]
    b.   One of them Ja*mes* came over and borrowed 3 pounds of me <u>and he going</u> to the diggin*gs*
('… while he was going …') [Hogan_04, 1857]
    c.   and once our waggon overset <u>and we in it</u> but received no material injury except the children's faces a little scratchd
('… while we were in it …') [WrighH01, 1802]

This use type is generally thought to be a syntactic transfer feature from Irish, which, in very similar fashion, uses the connector *agus* ('and') both as a co-ordinating conjunction and as a non-finite clausal subordinator, with a very similar range of meanings.

Summing up, the picture that emerges from these findings is the following: while certain uses of subordinating *and,* together with the marginal use of nominatives in absolute participle constructions, were present in various forms of Late Modern English and plausibly also in those that served as input to the language contact situation in Ireland between the 17th and the 19th centuries, southern forms of Hiberno-English, apparently under the influence of a formally comparable syntactic pattern in Irish, radically extended the use of subordinating *and* by making it take over certain new functions which it had in Irish but not previously in English. In doing so, Hiberno-English consolidated the use of the nominative, developing it from the minor and rather marginal use type that it was in English, into an apparently much more frequent

and more deeply entrenched feature of its syntactic system. This increased use of the nominative found a parallel or further extension in the innovative use of the same case in another group of constructions too, namely in those non-initial gerund clauses that were governed by potentially accusative-assigning verbs or prepositions. It is to these constructions that we will turn next.

2.2.3   *Non-initial gerund clauses in Hiberno-English*
Unlike the use of subordinating *and,* the other non-finite nominative subject (NNS) constructions in Hiberno-English have up to now found little or no attention in the literature. Hence, to the best of my knowledge, appropriate data regarding their existence and distribution in modern dialects of Irish English is lacking at present,[5] and the presentation below will be confined to 19th-century attestations from our corpus. Apart from that, there are only occasional remarks about some dialectal constructions that are somewhat similar, but not quite identical, to the type to be documented here. For instance, Henry (1957: 190) documents cases of nominative subjects with *to*-infinitives in a 20th-century Connacht dialect (10), but does not mention parallel cases with gerunds.

(10)   It's a point o' law <u>for she to put</u> him out
        ('Her right to put him out (of the house) is legally debateable') [Henry 1957: 190]

Another rare hint is found in Filppula (1999: 197), who quotes examples with *-ing* forms following *when;* however, since *when* in Standard English can introduce both non-finite (participial) and finite subclauses, both these examples could be understood simply as finite clauses with copula drop, a feature that is independently well attested in some Hiberno-English dialects. As will become clear shortly, an analysis as finite copula drop is excluded in many of the cases to be presented below. The *when* cases also differ from most of the others discussed in this section insofar as *when* does not govern case in Standard English and would therefore not be a candidate for ECM-style licensing of accusative case either.

(11) a.   indeed I walked it myself <u>when I</u> young [Filppula 1999: 197]
    b.   I remember <u>when I</u> going to school, I remember three of my uncles went away [...] she and most of her family went to America, <u>when I</u> going to school. [Filppula 1999: 197]

In our corpus, nominatives in gerund clauses in potential ECM environments are attested with a variety of different governing elements. Most often they occur as complements of prepositions, both prepositional adverbial adjuncts and as parts of prepositional phrasal-verb constructions. There are also a few attestations of object clauses governed directly by a verb. The most frequently attested governing subordinator is *after.* In Standard English, *after* would require subjectless constructions under conditions of subject control, i.e. obligatory co-reference between the matrix subject and the non-overt subject of the embedded clause. Strikingly, in our examples (12), overt nominative sub-

jects are included both with and without co-reference with the matrix subject. They also occur with the *after*-clause both preceding and following the main clause.

(12) a.   If a an Irishman goes to drive horses or Bullocks here <u>after he</u> comming out from home, he might as well go whistle a gig to a milestone [Normil03, 1863]
    b.   <u>After he</u> returning the Creditors Came and took charge of all the goods [Normil04, 1863]
    c.   My Sister Bridget stoped with her old Misses <u>after I</u> leaving, [Normil04, 1863]
    d.   Their Father & Mother felt very uneasy <u>after they</u> going but the*y* are delighted now [Dunne_12, 1874]
    e.   Mrs Farrell had high mass for the repose of his Soul in a few day <u>after She</u> getting word from   his wife [DunneJ01, 1868]

Similar constructions are found with various other prepositional subordinators (13):

(13) a.   I recd. your letter about the first of Jany. last and would have written an answer to you ere now were it not <u>for I</u> being paying Michl. Moores passage as required by you [Hogan_04, 1857]
    b.   Her uncles & aunt was very much dissapointed <u>in She</u> not coming. [Mahony02, 1887]
    c.   Michl. Gready Patt McGrath and Bridget Neylon were as glad as if we Gave them a thousand pound <u>for we</u> being along with them. [Normil01, 1854]
    d.   Moreland Sold his property twelve Months ago to his tennants & agreed to Sell this Evicted farom to the Evicte{****} <u>by he</u> Getting one thousant pounds from the Land Commissioners [MarshM05, 1907]
    e.   what is the Cause <u>of we</u> not Getting the possession of this farom [MarshM04, 1907]
    f.   The place was finally handed over to me by my niece on 1st Nov '03 <u>on I</u> paying her the sum of £42 and £3 Cost [ReillP01, 1907]

The following examples show NNS constructions in object clauses of *verba sentiendi* (14). (14b) is particularly interesting, as the nominative subject is a resumptive pronoun syntactically duplicating an extracted *wh-* element:

(14) a.   When I heard <u>she</u> being in this place I went to see her directly [Normil04, 1863]
    b.   I have a friend <u>which</u> I did not know <u>she</u> being in this Town until of late, Michael Healys daughter from Ballanagun. [Normil04, 1863]

All in all, the NNS constructions in question are not particularly frequent in the corpus data: in a corpus of c.227,000 words, there are a total of 19 unambiguous tokens (counting only those tokens where the subject is unmistakably a nominative pronoun, excluding cases of *you* and *it* as well as all tokens involving full lexical nominals.) To these we may add 9 tokens of subordinating *and* with nominative subjects, and 10 tokens of nominative absolutes of the type also found in mainstream English (these latter forms being apparently a feature of formal, conservative written registers in gen-

eral, and probably not particularly characteristic of the spoken dialects reflected in these writings). Given the small numbers, it is clear that not much can be inferred with statistical certainty about their distribution across the corpus. Nevertheless, the attestations provide ground for the hypothesis that the pattern is a regular and productive one, not restricted to idiomatic lexical idiosyncrasies of certain subordinating elements but rather a general syntactic pattern characteristic of gerund clauses at large, at least in certain forms of Hiberno-English.

Moreover, the distribution of the attestations across the different individuals in the corpus indicates that within the spectrum of varieties and registers represented, the NNS structures are characteristic of specifically Irish-influenced dialectal varieties.[6] Eight of the nine informants who use the NNS construction come from the southern provinces of Ireland, and except for one (or possibly two) they are all Catholics. Moreover, most of the individuals involved here display heavy signs of other dialectal phenomena in their writings which can be also characterised as Hibernicisms and/or which can also be plausibly linked to Irish contact effects. NNS constructions are conspicuously absent from other writers in the corpus whose linguistic profiles display signs of different dialectal backgrounds, especially those influenced by northern, Ulster-Scots speech forms. The southern Irish dialects are usually regarded as the historical outcome of the development of a mixture of mainly southwest English settler dialects with a strong contact-induced admixture of Irish substrate features. It is therefore reasonable to assume that contact effects are likely to have played some role in the development of the NNS constructions too.

2.3   Subject marking in non-finite clauses in Irish

Having discussed the use of nominatives in English non-finite clauses, we can now turn to Irish in order to investigate in what ways it would have provided any relevant structural parallels. As is well known, Irish non-finite clauses are formed with the help of a verbal noun (VN). There is a variety of structural configurations: the non-finite clause may be headed by a bare verbal noun, or by a verbal noun preceded by the particle *a* (15); or, in yet other environments, the verbal noun may appear as part of a progressive periphrastic construction headed by the progressive marker *ag* (16).

(15)   *roimh í   a dhul*
       before she going
       'before she went …' [Bráithre Críostaí 1960: 248]

(16)   *agus é   ag tíocht ó   bhainis*
       and he at coming from wedding
       '… when he was coming from a wedding' [Ó Siadhail 1989: 284]

There is also some variation in the coding of subject (and object) arguments of these clauses. Owing to its nominal, gerund-like quality, the VN may take genitive argu-

ments in certain environments, realised as either a genitive-marked full NP following the VN, or a possessive pronoun preceding it. However, unlike in English, it is regularly the object argument, not the subject, that is coded in this way.[7] Subjects of verbal-noun clauses can be expressed as oblique agent phrases, using the preposition *do* 'to' (17, 18). This preposition is used elsewhere in Irish to express possessors too (similar to French *à*). As a means of coding subjects/agents, it has no obvious parallels in English. The *do*-agents can appear either after (17) or before (18) the verbal noun.

(17)   *Le linn an chaint sin a rá   dó*
       while this talk   saying to.him
       'while he was saying this …' [Bráithre Críostaí 1960: 256]

(18)   *Le linn dúinn a bheith ag fanacht leo   …*
       while to.us being   at waiting with.them …
       'while we were waiting for them …' [Ó Dónaill 1977, v.s. "do"]

An alternative strategy for the coding of either objects or subjects is the use of a structure that has variously been called "raising" (Noonan 1995, Disterheft 1982), "promotion" (Armstrong 1977) or "displacement" (Genee 1998). Here, a nominal or pronominal argument, in the unmarked common case, is placed in a preposed ("promoted") position, to the left of the verbal noun, i.e. in a position superficially resembling that of the subject of English gerund clauses (19,20). This position can hold either object or subject arguments in Irish.[8] The following VN in these constructions is usually marked by the particle *a* and lenition, historically a reflex of a former preposition *do* ('to').[9] According to Ó Siadhail (1989: 277) and Genee (1998: 442), there has been an historical trend away from the genitive/*do* to the promotion structures.

(19)   *tar éis iad féin   a shábháil na gcéata*
       after they themselves saving   hundreds.gen
       '… after they themselves saved hundreds' [Ó Siadhail 1989: 256]

(20)   *an bun   a bhí   le   mé féin a thógaint geite*
       the reason that was with I myself taking   fright.gen
       '… the reason of my becoming frightened' [Ó Siadhail 1989: 256]

Of the three coding strategies for nominal arguments with verbal nouns in Irish, two diverge quite radically from English: the genitive coding because it picks out the wrong argument, and the prepositional coding because it has no structural counterpart in English at all.[10] It is thus only the third, the promotion construction with the morphologically unmarked NP to the left of the verbal noun clause (15, 19, 20), that offers itself as a basis for cross-linguistic identification and may be implicated in a possible transfer process regarding the nominative-subject structures in Hiberno-English. It is therefore useful to compare briefly the structural properties of the promotion construction in Irish with those of the subject position of gerund clauses in English.

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The position of the "promoted" nominal argument to the left of the verbal noun is unique within the overall system of Irish grammar, as it diverges radically from the normal verb-initial (and, more generally speaking, head-initial) pattern that Irish displays everywhere else. In finite clauses, neither objects nor subjects can usually precede their verbs in Irish, unless fronted through special syntactic processes. There are basically three approaches that can be found in the literature in treating the anomaly of this pre-VN position formally. Some, like Disterheft (1982) and Noonan (2003), have characterised the construction as an instance of "raising", assuming that the promoted nominal is moved out of the embedded clause to occupy a structural object position in the matrix clause. For Noonan (1995: 72f.), the crucial argument for this analysis is the occurrence of the disjunct pronoun forms in these positions, which he identifies as "object forms". As I argued above I consider that morphological identification misleading.

Furthermore, there is strong structural evidence that indeed the promoted NP behaves syntactically as part of a single constituent together with the following *a*-VN phrase, a fact that rallies against a raising analysis in the strict sense. This is suggested, among other things, by the fact that they can occur together as sentence fragments in elliptical sentences (Bráithre Críostaí 1960: 251). Moreover, when the promoted element is a pronoun and the subclause is governed by a preposition in the matrix domain, the preposition fails to fuse with the pronoun into a so-called inflected preposition form, as would be expected if the pronoun was formally an element of the matrix construction. This clearly shows that the governing relation is not between the preposition and the nominal argument as a standalone constituent of the matrix clause, but between the preposition and the NP-*a*-VN construction as a whole. See also Genee (1998: 451), referring to Armstrong (1977) for further arguments against the raising analysis.

It should be noted that the analysis of the promoted nominal as part of a common NP-*a*-VN constituent is not contradicted by cases in which it is visibly moved away from the verbal-noun construction, as this seems to happen through independently motivated mechanisms, for instance by wh-extraction (22), focussing extraction to the right (23), or in an 'easy-to-please' construction (25) (examples adapted from Bráithre Críostaí 1960: 251).

(21)   *Dúirt sí   leis   na leabhair a dhíol*
       said   she with.him the books   selling
       'She told him to sell the books'

(22)   *Cá bhfuil na leabhair a dúirt sí   leis   a dhíol*
       where are the books   rel said she with.him selling
       'Where are the books that she told him to sell?'

(23)   *Dúirt sí   leis   gan a dhíol ach na leabhair*
       said   she with.him neg selling but the books
       'She told him to sell only the books.'

(24)   *Is furasta é   a mhealladh*
       is easy   he deceiving
       'It is easy to deceive him.'

(25)   *Tá sé furasta a mhealladh*
       is he easy   deceiving
       'He is easy to deceive.'

If one accepts the analysis that the promoted element (such as *iad féin* in example (19)) is part of a single NP-*a*-VN constituent, this leaves as a further issue of formal analysis the question of headedness within this construction. Studies that have dealt primarily with the diachronic development of the construction since Old Irish (Gagnepain 1963: 18, Genee 1998: 451) have assumed that the promoted NP is the head, implying that the *a*-VN phrase is in some way adjoined to it on the right. This view is primarily motivated by the historical roots of the construction: the particle preceding the VN was originally the preposition *do* ('to'), and thus the syntax of the construction [NP [*do* [VN]] overtly resembles that of an NP postmodified by an adjoined *do*-possessor phrase [NP [*do* [NP]]. Moreover, as Genee (1998: 104) points out, the promoted nominal originally carried overt case marking (genitive or accusative), reflecting the case assigned to the embedded construction as a whole by the governing matrix construction (cf. Gagnepain 1963: 129–134, 235–240). However, genitives in this position are reported to have survived only as an optional structure in the modern dialects, having been largely replaced by a structure where the promoted nominal is in the invariant common case regardless of the matrix construction (Gagnepain 1963: 240, Ó Siadhail 1989: 276).

In contrast to the view that regards the promoted NP as the head, recent analyses of present-day Irish conducted within a generative approach have chosen to interpret it as occupying a specifier position at the left edge of a clausal structure projected by the VN. This analysis obviously fits more easily with the common assumption of clausal constituent order being determined by elements moving upwards across a universal grid of positions defined by a set of functional heads c-commanding the verb in an X-bar scheme. According to different versions of this view (see the survey in Carnie 1995: 90–98), the particle *a* is assumed to represent a functional head position, variously identified as Agr (Duffield 1991) or AgrO (Noonan 1992, Bobaljik/Carnie 1992), and the promoted object and/or subject is either in its specifier position or else, a step higher up in the tree, in Spec-T.

The formal accounts differ technically in how they handle the question of case. As far as I am aware, none of those analyses that see the promoted NP in a specifier position deals with those alternative (conservative) structures where it bears overt genitive case-marking assigned by the governing matrix element. As for the other, more modern option, where the promoted NP is in the common unmarked case, all the generative analyses seem to agree that the structural case (in the abstract sense of Chomskyan case theory) assigned to it is indeed an accusative, not a nominative (Tallerman 2005: 850). This assumption is upheld even by Carnie (1995: 88), who elsewhere acknowl-

edges that the morphological facts – i.e. the use of disjunct pronoun forms – are not necessarily evidence for accusative as opposed to nominative status (1995: 160f.). While the assignment of accusative case to promoted object NPs presents no theoretical problem within this framework, the assignment of assumedly accusative case to promoted subjects requires some exceptional mechanism. Different analyses assume either accusative assignment via non-finite properties of T, or an 'exceptional case-marking' (ECM) mechanism – but the latter not involving any overt matrix element as in English, but a hypothesised non-overt complementiser at the left edge of the embedded clause.

If one abstracts away from the purely theory-internal sides of these analyses, one finds them to agree on one point: they are all based on the intuition that the structural licensing conditions for the promoted nominals are strictly clause-internal and can be descriptively stated in terms of linear order of elements within the bounds of the embedded clause alone, particularly in terms of adjacency with the following *a*-VN constituent. There is no structural dependency between the promoted nominals and any particular syntactic configuration involving overt elements further up in the matrix domain. In particular, if one ignores the optional genitive structures mentioned earlier, there is no evidence of anything openly resembling the English ECM mechanism. If, moreover, one discards the theory-internally motivated assumption of a universal nominative-accusative case distinction, taking into account that Modern Irish lacks any overt morphological expression of such a contrast, then it seems fair to sum up that the constructional frame responsible for the licensing of these VN arguments is defined in purely positional terms and does not involve case-marking in the sense of an overtly expressed morphological mechanism at all. The syntactic relation between the nominal and the VN is not morphologically coded on the nominal – neither by case morphology proper nor by the other principal means of morphological coding available in Irish, initial consonant mutations. The case properties specified for this position can thus best be described as being simply the maximally unmarked, common case.

3.   Conclusions: Transfer and markedness in the development of Hiberno-English NNS structures

We can now summarise the essential structural difference between the Irish and the English systems with respect to the subject position in non-finite clauses: Standard English requires subjects in the initial position of gerund and infinitive clauses to be licensed through a case-assignment relation with an overt, adjacent governing element, using either genitive assigned by the gerund itself, or accusative assigned via ECM from outside the clause. Present-day Irish has a structural subject slot found in superficially the same position, before a verbal noun, but its structural conditioning is different: subjects in this position are not sensitive to licensing through a government

relation from outside the clause, and they bear no morphological marking to reflect such a licensing relation.

It seems to have been this relationship of deceptive structural similarity between English and Irish that provided the ground for a transfer-induced structural reanalysis of the English gerund clauses by Irish learners. In their English input, Irish learners in the 18th and 19th centuries were obviously faced with a situation of great variability in pronoun marking in a number of closely related constructions, a situation which would easily lead to systemic simplification or restructuring. In gerund clauses, there was variation between accusative and genitive marking. Moreover, although initially rare, there was also the superficially similar absolute participle construction, which already had the nominative. We may hypothesise that this nominative usage first increased in frequency as Irish speakers co-opted the absolute-participle pattern in order to create the Hiberno-English subordinating-*and* clauses of the type *"I saw John and he going home",* on the model of Irish *"Chonaic mé Seán agus é ag dul abhaile".* This nominative usage then could also serve as an analogical trigger for an extension of nominatives into the – superficially similar – subject positions of gerund clauses proper. What made this extension structurally motivated was, in turn, the reanalysis of the gerund clauses on the model of the corresponding Irish verbal-noun clauses: Irish learners apparently failed to acquire the rules of the morphosyntactic licensing relation between the governing matrix element and the accusative-marked subject position in these clauses, because such a licensing relation was not (or at least not obligatorily) a feature of the corresponding Irish structures. Thus, Irish speakers could opt for the nominative, which they perceived as the maximally unmarked case-form of English, and which in this respect corresponded to the Irish disjunct *(é, í, iad)* pronoun forms. This correspondence held even though both sets of pronouns had otherwise completely different, almost reverse, distributions in finite clauses. It was thus abstract structural relations between constructions and between morphological paradigms, rather than superficial equivalence relations between individual items, that were decisive in contact-induced structural transfer.

Notes

2.   The *Hamburg Corpus of Irish Emigrant Letters* (Pietsch, i. prog.) is being compiled at the University of Hamburg. Some of the material is also available in previously published collections: Miller *et al.* (2003), Fitzpatrick (1994), and O'Farrell (1984); the rest was collected from various archival sources in Ireland. In the preliminary form used for this study, the corpus consisted of some 230,000 words produced by 162 writers, ranging from the early 18th to the beginnings of the 20th century. It consists of letters, diary entries and other similar sub-literary

text types, most of them written in the context of emigration from Ireland to America and Australia or related in some other ways to the political and social upheavals of the 19th century.

3.   For the present discussion, we can set aside the discussion about the genitive *-s* being a phrasal/syntactic rather than morphological category. I shall assume, for the purposes of this paper, that both the possessive *-s* on nouns or noun phrases, and the possessive forms of pronouns, are representative of a common grammatical category 'genitive' in English.

4.   An anonymous referee rightly points to a similar line of argumentation in Wigger (1970: 36). Wigger also mentions the survival of lenited *thú* as a specifically accusative alternant of *tú,* as being the only isolated remnant of a genuine morphological nominative-accusative contrast in the language. The same referee also mentions an older approach proposed by Hartmann (1960: 11), who attempts to justify the nominative-accusative distinction on the basis of a unified semantically-based characterisation of the two forms. According to him, the "nominative" denotes "an entity presented as differentiated and identical to itself, from which the event originates" ("einen als differenziert und mit sich selbst identisch gesetzten Gegenstand, von dem der Vorgang seinen Ausgang nimmt"), while the "accusative" denotes "a participant which is neutral with respect to the feature of 'differentiated, positive origin'" ("Beteiligung eines Gegenstandes am Vorgang bei Indifferenz gegenüber dem Merkmal 'differenzierter, gesetzter Ausgangspunkt'"). Based as it is in a theory of linguistic relativism (1960: 8), this proposal seems of little relevance in the present debate.

5.   In an internet discussion forum in 1991, Marion Gunn attested to the use of nominatives in *after*-clauses in present-day Dublin English: "after he going out".

[http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/~smacsuib/gaelic-m/logfiles/91/log9109.txt]

6.   This hypothesis will be the subject of a separate, more extensive study elsewhere.

7.   Only occasionally, subjects of intransitive verbs can also be coded as genitives: *bhíomar ag súil lena dteacht* (lit. 'we.were at hoping with.their coming'; 'we were hoping for them to come'). (Bráithre Críostaí 1960: 260).

8.   According to Ó Siadhail (1989: 256), there is some dialectal variation: while in northern dialects of Modern Irish, both a subject and an object (in this order) can be promoted in front of a VN, southern Irish has only a single structural slot that can hold either a subject or an object but not both.

9.   Here, too, there is dialectal variation, as northern Irish dialects allow the verbal noun without the particle if the promoted nominal is an intransitive subject (Ó Siadhail 1989: 257f.).

10.   Henry (1957: 186) quotes some examples in mid-20th-century Roscommon English where the Irish *do*-agents have apparently led to a calque using *of*-agents in English: *I saw him, goin' to Mass o' me* ('… when I was going to Mass'); *They were there comin' away o' me* ('… when I was coming away'). Nothing resembling these structures is attested in our corpus.

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SECTION 3

Finiteness in text and discourse