Relative Clause Structure in Scottish Gaelic

or

Dé a tha sibh a' deanamh le ur facail?

Stephen Stortz
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Advisor: Ted Fernald
2nd Reader: Haddass Sheffer
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Scottish Gaelic is a member of the Celtic language family, specifically the Q-Celtic division, named for the occurrence of /k/ in the phonemic inventory. Scottish Gaelic’s sisters include Irish Gaelic and Manx. Breton, Cornish and Welsh are close cousins belonging to the P-Celtic branch, all of these languages lacking /k/. The relation between Welsh and especially Irish Gaelic (henceforth Irish) to Scottish Gaelic (henceforth Gaelic) allows significant comparisons which will serve both to enlighten the analysis of relative clause syntax in Gaelic and to extend the corpus of relevant texts; otherwise Gaelic is rather poorly represented in recent literature.

The sentence structure of Gaelic surfaces as verb-subject-object (VSO) although the underlying structure is argued to be subject-verb-object (SVO). The specifics of the debate between SVO and VSO as underlying structures fall outside the scope of this paper, however the overt manifestation of VSO syntax weighs heavily on the grammaticality and interpretation of relative clause formations. The focus of this paper is to demonstrate the different relative strategies available to Gaelic and test them against the claimed universals of relative clause formation set forth in Keenan and Comrie, 1977.

Edward Keenan and Bernard Comrie introduced the notion of an accessibility hierarchy of sentential positions in order to explain the tendency for languages to relativize certain noun phrases and not others. Accessibility is a psychological function which describes the ease with which a speaker can relativize a given phrase or parse relative clauses constructed from given sentential positions. The theory posits

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an ordering of noun phrases from most to least accessible as follows: subject, direct object, indirect object, oblique object, genitive, and object of comparison. An oblique object is defined as 'a noun phrase that expresses arguments of the main predicate, as the chest in John put the money in the chest rather than ones having a more adverbial function like...that day in John left on that day (p. 66).’ The genitive is the class denoted in English by 's or of as in John’s nose or the king of the hill. In the previous phrases, John and the hill are in the genitive. The object of comparison is exemplified by a speeding bullet in Superman is faster than a speeding bullet.

Keenan and Comrie claim that in all languages, three constraints, called the hierarchy constraints, must apply. These are:

1. A language must be able to relativize subjects.
2. Any relative clause forming strategy must apply to a continuous segment of the accessibility hierarchy.
3. Strategies that apply at one point of the accessibility hierarchy may in principle cease to apply at any lower point. (p. 67)

According to these rules, if a relative forming strategy operates on any two positions in the accessibility hierarchy, then all the positions between must also belong to the domain of the strategy. No language ought to have a strategy which relativizes the genitive and the indirect object, for example, and not the oblique object. Nor should a language exist in which the subject position is not accessible to some relative forming strategy. Languages typically utilize more than one strategy for forming relative clauses, and the above rules do not exclude the possibility of two strategies overlapping in coverage, or of a language which has a strategy for relativizing some initial positions and another for some final positions, but none for a medial position, such as indirect object. Languages may skip positions in terms of overall accessibility, but no one strategy may apply to disjoint segments of the hierarchy.
Keenan and Comrie describe relative forming strategies as either prenominal or postnominal and either +case or -case. In a prenominal strategy, the head of the relative clause appears to the right. Postnominal strategies have heads occurring on the left. English is postnominal as demonstrated by *the car which won the race* where *the car* appears to the left of *which won the race*, the modifying or restricting clause. Strategies described as +case must assign a case to a nominal element of the relative clause either by a preposition or inflection. Thus, *the boy to whom I lent my comb* is a +case strategy since *whom* appears in the objective case. In -case strategies, the relative pronouns are all available as subjects, as in *the man who Juliette married* where *who* could be the subject of *the man who married Juliette* (p. 67).

Notwithstanding the grammarian's objection that the proper form of the above is *the man whom Juliette married*, a +case strategy, common parlance allows for -case constructions in the above environment. Finally, some relative forming strategies may embed the relative clause in the main clause, called internal strategies, but these are less common and not relevant to Gaelic.

Gaelic exhibits arguably six types of relative forming strategies: three which conform to the hierarchy constraints, and three which apply to situations outside the realm of the accessibility hierarchy, such as adverbial phrases. Before formally listing the six types, it is perhaps helpful to give a little sampling of some Gaelic sentences, a language with which the average linguist may not be very familiar.

A typical simple sentence of Gaelic begins with the verb, then the subject, then has optional room for direct and indirect objects, oblique arguments and adverbial phrases, usually in that order. Adverbial phrases may also precede the main verb, especially adverbs of time.

(1) *Ach nuair nach gabhainn mo dhinnear, bhuaileadh*  

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3 Except where noted, the example sentences are constructed independent of sources. In those which are taken from outside sources, I have provided the word gloss.
but when not take (1st sing cond) my dinner hit (3rd sing cond)

she me with the pan or cup water (gen) about the head

‘But when I would not take my dinner, she would beat me about the head with the pan or a cup of water.’ (Mullally 1993a, p.3)

The English gloss of this sentence shows no relative markings, but in the Gaelic, the particle *nach* is identical to the negative relative ‘that not’. A more literal rendering of the sentence reads ‘But when that not I would take my dinner...’ which is ungrammatical in English. Arguably, *nach* could be a verbal particle whose function is the negation of the finite verb and hence not a relative marker. Indeed, *nach* has uses other than in relative clauses.

(2) Nach eil na caileagan aig an taigh? (Mullally 1993b, p. 9)

Not be the girls at the house

‘Aren’t the girls at home?’

(3) Is tus a Seumas, nach tus a? (Mullally 1993b, p.7)

Be you James not be you

‘You are James, aren’t you?’

In the above cases, *nach* is not a part of any relative structure, but the form of the sentences in which *nach* is not a relative particle is restricted to questions. The productive method of forming negative tag questions is to attach *nach* + [dependent form of the main verb] to the end of a positive sentence.

(4) Ghabh sibh am bainne a-raoir, nach do ghabh?

Drink (past) you the milk last night not DEP drink (past, dep)

‘You drank the milk last night, didn’t you?’

This question could also be rendered:
(5) Nach do ghabh sibh am bainne a-raoir?
'Didn't you drink the milk last night?'

The particle *do* which is glossed DEP is a particle which distinguishes the dependent from the independent form of the past verbs in Gaelic. The distinction is partially syntactic and governs the form of verbs in certain types of clauses. In (2) and (3), however, the particle *do* does not appear. This is due to the nature of the two verbs 'to be' in Gaelic, *is* and *tha*.

The copula in Gaelic is *is*, which can be used in sentences which predicate a definite noun phrase with the subject, also definite.

(6) *Is mise am fear aig an doras.*

*be I the man at the door*

'I am the man at the door.'

Like all verbs of Gaelic, *is* does not agree with subjects in the past or present, thus the gloss 'be'. There are three inflections of *is* for negatives and questions. They are *cha* 'not be', *an* 'be?' the interrogative used in expectation of an affirmative response, and *nach* 'not be?' in expectation of a negative response. Other constructions involving *is* are typically idioms.

(7) *Is urrainn dhomh Gàidhlig a bhruaidhinn.* (Black 1992, p. 119)

*be possible to me Gaelic to speak*

'I can speak Gaelic.'

On the other hand, *tha* is used in sentences with predicate adjectives or as the main verb in progressive sentences.

(8) *Tha mo phiuthar sgìth.*

*be my sister tired*

'My sister is tired.'
Tha Teàrlach a' glanadh a char an-diugh.

be Charles at cleaning his car today

‘Charles is cleaning his car today.’

The inflections of \( \text{tha} \) in the present are: \( \text{chan eil ‘not be’, am bheil} \) ‘be?’ and \( \text{nach eil ‘not be?’} \) The incidence of \( \text{nach} \) in examples (2) and (3) is thus explained by the inflected forms of the verbs ‘to be’ and is not a relative particle.

In example sentence (7), \( \text{dhomh} \), glossed as ‘to me’, is known as a prepositional pronoun. Gaelic prepositions merge with pronouns to give these combined forms. The example, \( \text{dhomh} \), is derived from the preposition \( \text{do ‘to’ and mi ‘me, I’}. \) Gaelic has unique pronouns and prepositional pronouns for each number, person, and in the case of third singular, gender. Most Gaelic prepositions are inflected to distinguish between indefinite and definite prepositional objects. Thus, \( \text{le chat ‘with a cat’ but leis a’ chat ‘with the cat’}. \) The third person singular masculine prepositional pronoun is often the same form as the definite preposition, however the latter must be followed by an object.

Case 1, the \textit{independent} construction\(^6\): With this little introduction to basic Gaelic sentence structure to serve as a foundation, the next step is to introduce the types of relative forming strategies. The first is a postnominal, -case strategy which applies to subjects and direct objects.

(10) Chunnaic mi an cù a dh’ith am biadh

\( \text{see (past) I the dog that (past) eat}\) the meat

\(^4\) Some orthographic systems use \( \text{a bheil} \) in an attempt to correspond more closely with the pronunciation. Black,1992 retains the more traditional form, and hence this paper also.

\(^5\) The names which are assigned to each case are purely for reference and not meant to be exact descriptions of the respective strategies.

\(^6\) The reason that the gloss of \( \text{chunnaic} \) is ‘see (past)’ and \( \text{dh’ith} \) is ‘(past) eat’ is that the \( \text{dh’} \) marks past tense for verbs beginning with vowels, and it represents an attempt to align the \( \text{dh’} \) with the gloss (past) without dividing \( \text{dh’ith} \) into two discrete elements.
'I saw the dog that ate the meat.'

In this case, *cù* is relativized to the left of the restricting clause and is unmarked for case, hence serves as subject in the related sentence:

(11) Dh’ith an cù am biadh.

(past) eat the dog the meat

'The dog ate the meat.'

Since *an cù* serves as subject of the underlying sentence and relative head of the derived sentence without inflection, the strategy is considered -case. Furthermore, the direct object *am biadh* can be relativized using this same strategy.

(12) Cheannaich mi am biadh a dh’ith an cù.

buy (past) I the meat that (past) eat the dog

'I bought the meat that the dog ate.'

As seen in these examples, the strategy is to extract the noun phrase from the restricting clause, place it to the left of the verb, and add the relative marker, *a*. To turn any of these clauses into negative constructions, *a* is replaced with *nacho*.

(13) Chunnaic mi an cù nach do dh’ith am biadh.

'I saw the dog which did not eat the meat.'

The verbal particle *do* which marks the dependent form of the verb appears since *nach* governs dependent verbs as in (4) even though *a* takes the independent form. The relative negative of (12) is:

(14) Cheannaich mi am biadh nach do dh’ith an cù.

'I bought the meat which the dog did not eat.'

This relative forming strategy gives rise to some unusual ambiguity since it governs subjects and direct objects, both of which appear after the verb in main clauses and to the left of the restricting clause when relativized. There is no inflectional distinction between a relativized subject or object, therefore the resulting
ambiguities must be resolved by semantics where possible. Given the simple sentence:

(15) Phòg mi an té.
    kiss (past) I the woman
    'I kissed the woman.'

The direct object can be relativized to give:

(16) Is ise an té a phòg mi.
    be she the woman who kiss (past) I
    'She is the woman whom I kissed.'

Alternately,

(17) Is ise an té a phòg mi.
    be she the woman who kiss (past) me
    'She is the woman who kissed me.'

The second reading derives from the underlying sentence:

(18) Phòg an té mi.
    'The woman kissed me.'

Depending on the role _mi_ assumes in the underlying sentence, (16) can be interpreted two ways. The ambiguity is only resolved by context and semantics, and thus a native speaker would never have trouble with a sentence like:

(19) Mharbh an cat a dh'ol an neimh.
    die (past) the cat that (past) drink the poison
    'The cat that drank the poison died.'

The other possible interpretation, 'The cat that the poison drank died' is unusual and therefore never confused with the common reading.

The restricting clause in Gaelic is considered as a definite phrase, and thus _is_ may be used in the main clause:
(20) Is mise a tha ann. (Calder 1923, p. 255)
be (copula) I that be (substantive) in (it)
'I it is.'
The underlying sentence is of the form:
(21) Tha mi (ann).
be I in it
'I am.'
The existential force of *tha* does not require a predicate argument the way *is* does, but in typical existential sentences of Gaelic, the preposition *ann* is added as an existential indicator. Scots English mirrors this sentence type in such expressions as, 'There's rain *in it* today.'

(22) Mu'n robh Abraham ann, Tha mise. (Calder 1923, p. 255)
before be (past, subst) Abraham in (it) be I
'Before Abraham was, I am.'
Note the use of the substantive verb 'to be' in the adverbial clause takes *ann* as a modifier indicating existence, but in the second sentence the focus is on the verb 'to be' and *ann* is omitted. In order to highlight the distinction in English, the gloss might read, 'Before there was Abraham, I am.'

The case 1 strategy conforms to the hierarchy constraints, and fulfills the requirement that all languages must be able to relativize subjects. Subjects and direct objects, the domain of this strategy, form a continuous segment of the accessibility hierarchy, and by the third hierarchy constraint, the strategy may cease to apply after direct objects.

Case 2, the *objective* construction: Another strategy, which applies to indirect objects, oblique objects and the genitive involves the use of prepositions.
(23) Is mise am fear ris am bheil t' athair a' bruidhinn.

be I the man to (def) whom be your father at speaking

'I am the man to whom your father is speaking.'

The particle a' glossed as 'at' marks a progressive construction with the Gaelic verbal noun \textit{bruidhinn}. The Gaelic verbal noun is comparable to the English '-ing' participle and is never inflected. Scots English which borrows heavily from Gaelic syntax shows evidence of a' in phrases like 'I'm out a-walking the dog.' The underlying form of (23) is:

(24) Tha t' athair a' bruidhinn rium.

be your father at speaking to me

'Your father is speaking to me.'

The prepositional pronoun \textit{rium} is derived from the preposition \textit{ri} 'at, against' and the pronoun \textit{mi} 'I, me'. As stated above, there is a distinct form of the prepositional pronoun for each person and number. The definite form of \textit{ri} is \textit{rio}. Thus in (23), the object of \textit{ris} is the restrictive clause am bheil t'athair a' bruidhinn which acts as a definite noun phrase just as in (20). The verb \textit{bheil} is the dependent form of \textit{tha} in the present, and \textit{am} is the dependent form of the relative corresponding to \textit{a}. The distribution of dependent versus independent forms is partially governed by the vocabulary and partially by syntax.

The lexical items which require the use of the independent verb and relative pronoun forms are sometimes referred to as type 1 or independent or \textit{cO-} type particles (Black 1992, p. 136). The type 2 or dependent or \textit{nach-} type particles require the dependent verb and relative pronoun forms. Arranged by type, they are as follows:
An *a* in parentheses indicates the trend to omit the relative pronoun after particles with final vowels. Some orthographic systems retain the *a*, some do not, but it never manifests itself in the phonology. Each entry in column 1 except *ma* and *na* can be made into a corresponding negative by replacing *a* with *nach* and substituting the appropriate dependent verb form. For example *có nach* 'who didn’t' and *ged nach* ‘although...not’. The negative of *ma* is *mur*, a type two particle. *Na* is used as a direct object relative pronoun as in (25).

(25) Seall  *ná* thóisich sibh.

look at what began you

‘Look what you’ve begun (Black 1992, p. 136).’

Syntax plays a lesser role in determining whether to use dependent or independent verb forms. Negative expressions and relative clauses governed by

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>type 1</th>
<th>type 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>a</em> - who, whom, which, when, that</td>
<td><strong>prepositions + an</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>bho’n a</em> - because</td>
<td><strong>càit’ an</strong> - where?</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>car-son a</em> - why?</td>
<td><strong>far an</strong> - where</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ciamar a</em> - how?</td>
<td><strong>gus an</strong> - until</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>có (a)</em> - who? whom?</td>
<td><strong>cha</strong> - negation of a main verb</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>cuin’ a</em> - when?</td>
<td><strong>gun</strong> - that (conjunction)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>dé (a)</em> - what?</td>
<td><strong>mun, mus</strong> - before, lest, in case</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>ged a</em> - although, though, even if</td>
<td><strong>mur</strong> - if not, unless</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>mar a</em> - as</td>
<td><strong>nach</strong> - negative of <em>a, an, gun</em></td>
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<tr>
<td><em>nuair a</em> - when</td>
<td>(Black 1992, pp. 136-7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ma</em> - if (but not before conditionals)</td>
<td><strong>ná</strong> - that which, those who, what</td>
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*(Black 1992, pp. 136-7)*
prepositions take dependent forms, but one could consider the prepositions and negative particles as the determining factors, and not the syntactic structure. The significant result of the dependent versus independent constructions is that in order to relativize indirect and oblique objects, both the verb and the relative pronoun must take their dependent forms. In fact, Mullally 1993c makes only a two way distinction in relativization strategies, direct (independent) and indirect (dependent) (pp. 20-1).

Unlike the case 1 strategy, the case 2 strategy is postnominal and +case. The domain of case 2 is any prepositional phrase, including indirect objects, oblique objects and certain forms of the genitive.

(26) 'Se am bogsa anns an do chuir sinn ar not.

it is the box into which DEP put (past) we our pound

'It's the box into which we put our pound.'

The oblique object ‘the box’ is relativized using the fronted preposition *anns* and the dependent form of put, *do chuir*. The relative particle *an* is the same as the *am* used in (23) except *am* assimilates to the point of articulation of the initial consonant of *bheil*. *Ann* is the definite form of *ann* ‘in, into’. The construction with ‘*se* in the main clause is a special use of *is* formed from a contraction of *is + e(san)* ‘be’ + ‘it, he’. The use of ‘*se* will be further explained in regard to the fourth relative forming strategy. It is sufficient at this point to equate ‘*se* with ‘it’s’.

The Gaelic genitive is formed either with the prepositions *aig* ‘at’ or *le* ‘with’, or the genitive case. Genitives formed by prepositions can be relativized using the second strategy.

(27) ‘Se a’ chaileag aig am bheil an sporan.

it’s the girl at whom be the purse

‘It’s the girl whose purse it is.’
Example (27) is more common for the expression of possession. Examples using _le_ are reserved for strong emphasis on ownership, and the related underlying form (29) is more likely to surface as an emphatic sentence (30) in which the prepositional phrase is fronted.

(29) Tha an sporan leis a' chaileig.

be the purse with the girl (dat)

'The girl owns the purse.'

(30) 'Sann leis a’ chaileig a tha an sporan sin.

it’s with the girl (dat) that be the purse that

'It's the girl who owns that purse.'

Gaelic prepositions govern the dative case, and hence _a’ chaileig_ in (29) and (30) but the nominative _a’ chaileag_ in (27) and (28). The ‘_sann_’ construction is similar to ‘se in its meaning, but its use is complementary. All nominal elements are fronted by ‘se while ‘_sann_’ fronts adverbials, prepositional phrases and adjectives. ‘_Sann_’ derives from _is + ann_ ‘be (copula)’ + ‘in (it)’. This instance of _ann_ resembles its existential use as in (22), which occurs only with the substantive _tha_. The ‘_sann_’ construction is problematic, and further analysis is suspended until the discussion of the fourth relative strategy.

The preposition _le_ need not express possession, but when it serves as an ordinary preposition, then the meaning is restricted to ‘with’.

(31) ‘Se am boireannach leis am faca mi a-raoir thu.

it’s the woman with whom see (past, dep) I last night you

'It's the woman with whom I saw you last night.' (Black 1992, p. 139)
The preposition *aig* may also be used as a non-possessive pronoun, however its use in relative clauses when not referring to possession differs from examples such as (27).

(32) **Seall an doras aig am bheil an croitear 'na shuidhe.**

look at the door at which be the crofter in his sitting

'Look at the door at which the crofter is sitting.'

The expression *'na shuidhe* is an idiomatic construction used for certain stative verbs, meaning simply 'sitting.' The only candidate for relativization in (32) by the case 2 strategy is *an doras* 'the door', the object of the underlying prepositional phrase *aig an doras*.

(33) **Tha an croitear 'na shuidhe aig an doras.**

be the crofter in his sitting at the door

'There's a crofter sitting at the door.'

By this strategy, *an croitear* cannot be relativized.

(34) **Seall an croitear 'na shuidhe aig am bheil an doras.**

*"Look at the crofter sitting at the door.'*

Sentence (34) could only mean 'Look at the crofter sitting who has the door (i.e. the crofter has the door, and he is sitting),' with the relative clause expressing possession as in (27). To relativize *an croitear*, the first strategy must operate.

(34) **Seall an croitear a tha 'na shuidhe aig an doras.**

look at the crofter who be in his sitting at the door

'Look at the crofter who is sitting at the door.'

The case 2 strategy conforms to the hierarchy constraints. Its domain is a continuous segment of the accessibility hierarchy, omitting no positions. Case 2 does not overlap with case 1 in coverage, and the application of either strategy to the domain of the other yields ungrammatical sentences. Applying case 1 to a case 2
sentence (28) gives:

(35) * 'Se a' chaileag leis a tha an sporan.

   it's the girl with whom be the purse

'It's the girl who owns the purse.'

Applying case 2 to a sentence in the domain of case 1 is also ungrammatical.

(36) *Cheannaich mi am biadh an do dh'ith an cu.

   buy (past) I the meat that DEP (past) eat the dog

'I bought the meat that the dog ate.'

The ungrammaticality judgments of the last two sentences do not depend upon the dialectal variation, but are deeply ingrained in the syntax.

Case 3, the proleptic construction: This relativization strategy is perhaps a subset of the case 2 strategy, but for purposes of discussion, shall be assigned its own number. As with case 2, the case 3 strategy is postnominal and +case. Case 3 shares also the same accessibility domain as case 2. However, it differs from case 2 in three respects. First, the preposition appears in clause final position instead of clause initial. Second, the preposition is inflected for person and number, or more precisely, the preposition is replaced by the prepositional pronoun. Third, the forms of the relative pronoun and verb are determined by the polarity of the clause. Negative clauses take dependent forms, and positive clauses take independent forms. This strategy is sometimes referred to as the proleptic construction (Black 1992, p. 139).

(37) a' chaileag a bhruidhinn mi rithe (Mullally 1993c, p.22)

   the girl whom speak I to her

'The girl to whom I spoke'

The literal translation of (37) is 'the girl that I spoke to her (Mullally 1993c, p.22),' since rithe is the prepositional pronoun meaning 'to her'. To negate a clause formed by this
strategy, a is replaced by nach and the dependent form of the verb is used.

(38) a' chaileag nach do bhruiddhinn mi rithe (Mullally 1993c, p.22)

the girl not whom DEP speak I to her

'The girl to whom I did not speak'

The constant factor in all case 3 clauses is the clause final prepositional pronoun. Any sentence formed by the case 2 strategy can be relativized by case 3 instead. For instance, sentence (27) could be rendered:

(39) 'Se a' chaileag a tha an sporan aice.

it's the girl whom be the purse at her

'It's the girl whose purse it is.'

However, examples of the genitive type where aig and Ie are used to indicate possession are less frequent candidates for case 3 relativization.

The case 3 strategy calls to mind the English construction in which prepositions are clause final, such as, 'the boy I gave my hat to'. English does not coreference the prepositional phrase to the relativized noun phrase, thus "the boy I gave my hat to him' is ungrammatical. English examples could be explained by noun phrase movement, allowing 'the boy' in 'I gave my hat to the boy' to appear at the front of the clause as a relativized indirect object. In Gaelic, however, movement alone does not account for the data.

(40) Chuir mi m' ad do 'n gille.

gave I my hat to the boy

'I gave my hat to the boy.'

(41) * an gille a chuir mi m' ad do

the boy whom gave I my hat to

To relativize sentence (40), either the preposition do must appear after the relativized noun phrase, or it must be replaced by the prepositional pronoun, dha 'to him'. Thus,
the movement rules which apply to the English proleptic construction do not apply to
the corresponding Gaelic forms. The added step of converting the preposition to the
appropriate prepositional pronoun must derive from a higher order syntactic function,
which lies beyond the scope of this exposition.

The first three cases of relative clause forming strategies outlined above
represent the most typical relativization processes in Gaelic. The three which follow
may not be considered true relative clause strategies by the purist grammarian,
however they do exhibit significant similarities to the first three cases, including
notably the use of the relative pronoun. Before beginning on the exposition of the last
three cases however, an explanation of the motivations for dividing the evidence thus
far into the three cases outlined above is in order.

As previously stated, Mullally 1993c divides the relative clauses into two
strategies for teaching purposes: the direct and the indirect (p. 20). The proleptic
strategy falls under the heading 'alternate relative construction (p. 22),' but whether it
belongs to either the direct or indirect division is unclear. Either way, a twofold
distinction between the relativization strategies is overly simplistic.

Recall from table 1 that the negative of both a and an, the dependent and
independent relative pronouns, is nach, a negative dependent pronoun. Thus the
negative of a sentence formed by the case 1 strategy is always dependent.

(42) Dé tha an t-each a dh‘iarr mi?
   where be the horse which (past) request I
   ‘Where’s the horse which I requested?’

(43) Dé tha an t-each nach do dh‘iarr mi?
   where be the horse which not DEP (past) request I
   ‘Where’s the horse which I did not request?’
Of course, the negative of a dependent clause is also dependent; thus Mullally's distinction poses difficulties for the relationship between affirmative and negative relative clauses. If a correspondence exists between the two such that the same relative forming strategy applies to both, then dependence cannot be used as a distinguishing factor. Given any negative relative clause, one cannot predict the dependence of the corresponding affirmative clause simply by observing that the negative clause is dependent. If negative clauses, on the other hand, bear no correlation to affirmative clauses, then negative clauses deserve their own strategy, and the twofold distinction disappears.

If there is underlyingly a twofold distinction, then dependence is certainly not the crucial factor. No single selection criterion suffices to group the strategies nicely. Table 2 is a comparison of the three strategies outlined above, and their distinguishing syntactic features. Any division of the data into two classes ignores some distinction among the relativization schemes.

Table 2: strategy +/- case dependence dependence hierarchy coreference?
in affir. cl. in neg. cl. domain

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<th></th>
<th>+/- case</th>
<th>dependence in affir. cl.</th>
<th>dependence in neg. cl.</th>
<th>hierarchy domain</th>
<th>coreference?</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>case 1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>+case</td>
<td>dep.</td>
<td>dep.</td>
<td>IO, OBL, GEN</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>case 3</td>
<td>+case</td>
<td>indep.</td>
<td>dep.</td>
<td>IO, OBL, GEN</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coreference indicates the agreement of some clause internal nominal with the relativized noun phrase as exhibited by *rithe* in example (37). It is ungrammatical for case 1 and case 2 to retain clause internal nominal agreement.

(44) * na cuileagan a mhothaich mi lad aig an uinneig
the flies which noticed I them at the window

‘the flies which I noticed at the window’
Glancing at the table, each strategy differs from any other in at least two areas (disregarding the category ‘hierarchy domain’ to prevent the accusation of circular reasoning). The three way case distinction respects these differences, and provides a relativization scheme of the language which conforms to the claimed universals of the accessibility hierarchy. Further motivation for the three way distinction is superfluous. The defense rests.

The final three strategies do not fit so nicely into the explanation of relative clauses afforded by Keenan and Comrie’s accessibility hierarchy. Nor do they conform to the expected pattern of relative clauses in other languages, in fact, some of the following clauses stand on their own as sentences. Their division is more arbitrary than the previous three cases, yet hopefully their grouping displays some semblance of organization.

Case 4, ‘Se and ‘Sann clauses: Fronting for emphasis is a very productive function of Gaelic syntax, to the extent that any phrase in a typical sentence can be fronted and emphasized. When the fronting occurs, the relative pronoun puts in an appearance, and ‘se or ‘sann monopolizes the sentence initial position. Fronted noun phrases select ‘se, all others fall to ‘sann.

(46) [thoisich] [mi] [air obair] [air a’ chroit againn] [aig an taigh]
  began I at work at the croft at us at the house
  ‘I began to work on our croft at home.’ (Mullally 1993 c, p. 55)

To express emphasis on any of the bracketed elements, the following syntactic contortions are possible:
(47) 'Se mise a thòisich air obair air a’ chroit againn aig an taigh
   it’s I (emph) who began at work at the croft at us at the house
   ‘It’s I who began to work on our croft at home.’
(48) ‘Sann air obair a thòisich mi air a’ chroit againn aig an taigh
   it’s at work that began I at the croft at us at the house
   ‘It’s working that I began to do on our croft at home.’
And so forth, through all the combinations. Usually only one bracketed element fronts
at a time, but depending upon the scope of a preposition for example, two or more
phrases could act as one.
(49) ‘Sann air obair air a’ chroit againn a thòisich mi aig an taigh.
   ‘It’s working on the our croft that I began to do at home.’
In the case of verbs, or any sentence initial phrase (adverbials of time often precede
the verb in Gaelic), simply add ‘sann and the relative pronoun to the already fronted
element.
(50) ‘Sann a thòisich mi air obair air a’ chroit againn aig an taigh
   ‘It’s (the case) that I started working on our croft at home.’
This particular use of ‘sann is “to emphasize the whole utterance and might be
translated ‘It is the case that...’ or ‘In fact...’ or ‘Indeed...’ (Black 1992, p. 57).”
Assuming for the moment that this construction is a subtype of case 1, since it
shares the feature of independence, then by the lack of coreference which
characterizes case 1, elements of the bracketed phrases themselves could not be
fronted. This is consistent with the following data:
(51) * ‘Sann againn a thòisich mi air obair air a’ chroit aig an taigh
   ‘It’s ours that I started working at the croft at home.’
In order to front againn, two relative clauses are required.
(52) ‘Sann againne a tha a’ chroit air an do thòisich mi aig it’s to us (emph) that be the croft on which DEP began I at an taigh. the house

‘It’s ours, the croft at which I began to work at home.’

However, if the embedded element is an object of a preposition, then coreferencing is permitted and the brackets cease to constrain.

(53) ‘Se am baile beag a bha mi a’ sgriobhadh uime. it's the town little which was I at writing about it

‘It’s the little town which I was writing about.’

Furthermore, with ‘se constructions, the case 2 strategy can apply.

(54) ‘Se am baile beag mu ’n robh mi a’ sgriobhadh it’s the town little about which was (dep) I at writing

‘It’s the little town about which I was writing.’

So the case 4 strategy is a hodgepodge of all sorts of problems and possibilities.

Recall that ‘se comes from *is* + *e*, that is ‘be’ + ‘he, it’. In some dialects, ‘se changes to ‘sì (*is* + i, ‘she’) to agree with feminine nouns (MacAulay 1988, p. 399).

Examining a typical example such as (47) shows that there seems to be one too many noun phrases hanging on the main verb. The subject of *is* is *e*, ‘he’ and the predicate noun phrase is *mise ‘I’,* but this does not leave room for the relative clause. If the true focus of the sentence is on the first person subject, then *e* becomes a problem for interpretation. The sentence actually reads, ‘He is I who began to work on our croft at home,’ the subject of which is ‘he’ not ‘I’.

MacAulay proposes that the ‘se construction derives from a sort of equation of clauses where *e* is a remnant of a deleted element in the relative clause.
Deletion rules eliminate *am fear* and leave surface sentences with an odd number of noun phrases dependent upon *is*. This analysis leads to a satisfying pairing of clauses as follows:

(56) \[ \text{is } e \text{ lain} \]
    \[
    \text{am fear } a \text{ dh'ith an t-aran}
    \]

Now *lain* and not *e* is paired with the relative clause, and *is* is a function mapping a pair of noun phrases to a relativized noun and its clause.

(57) \[ \text{is (e, lain) } \rightarrow \text{ (am fear, a dh'ith an t-aran) } \]
    \[
    \text{e } \rightarrow \text{ am fear}
    \]
    \[
    \text{lain } \rightarrow \text{ a dh'ith an t-aran}
    \]

This wonderful explanation unfortunately does not have a corollary for *'sann* clauses. The derivation of *'sann* is *is + ann* ‘be’ + ‘in it’. A correlation between the prepositional phrase *ann* and a fronted prepositional phrase breaks down as soon as fronted verbs and adverbials are thrown into the mix. Since both *'se* and *'sann* sentences have emphatic fronted elements set apart by the relative pronoun, they seem to belong to a common strategy, yet the resolution of *'sann* clauses is an elusive problem.

Case 5, *interrogatives*: Interrogative sentences of the yes-no type in Gaelic are usually formed by inserting an interrogative pronoun directly preceding the main verb. If the main verb is the copula, then the verb is replaced by the interrogative particle. However, for interrogatives such as *when, how, where, why* etcetera, the question takes the form of a relative clause.
(58) Ciamar a tha sibh?
   how that are you
   ‘How are you?’

The typical Gaelic greeting consists of an interrogative particle and a relative clause. For such a clause, there is hardly a corresponding underlying form.

(59) * Tha thu ciamar
   ‘You are how’

Besides, there seems to be no main verb at the sentence level. The a cannot be explained away as some sort of auxiliary like the English do in ‘How do you do?’ since other interrogatives use the dependent relative an and negative interrogatives take the negative relative pronoun nach.

(60) Càit’ an robh thu a-raoir?
    where that were you last night
    ‘Where were you last night?’

(61) Car-son nach d’ rinn thu do chuid obrach?
    why not that DEP do (past) you your bit work (gen)
    ‘Why didn’t you do you (share of) work?’

In fact, not only the interrogatives, but most of the conjunctive elements in table 1 also require a relative construction, although the relative pronoun need not appear overtly in the phonology or orthography (see table 1). To construct compound interrogatives like where from or what name, the preposition or noun phrase precedes the relative pronoun.

(62) Dé an t-ainm a th’ ort?
    what the name that is on you
    ‘What’s your name?’
(63) Có ás a tha thu?
   who from that you are

'Where are you from?'

This example fully illustrates the difference between the interrogative strategy and the other cases. Case 1 clauses do not apply to objects of prepositions such as ás. Case 2 clauses in the affirmative require dependent verbs and pronouns, yet the independent forms a tha appear in (63). Case 3 clauses are characterized by clause internal coreference to the relativized phrase, not so in case 5.

(64) * Có a tha a’ choille sin leis?
   who that (rel) be the forest that (demonst.) with him

'Who owns that forest?'

The grammatical rendering of this question (for an example of the underlying sentence see (28)) relies on case 5:

(65) Có leis a tha a’ choille sin?

'Who owns that forest?'

Finally, for colorful speech certain expletives can be inserted before the relative pronoun, for example:

(66) Dé an riabhach a tha sibh a’ deanamh le ur caora an-siud?
   what the devil that are you at doing with your sheep there

'What the devil are you doing with your sheep over there?

For which there is no underlying sentence, 'You are doing the devil with your sheep over there.'

The examples in which a noun phrase appears as the relativized object, for instance (62), appear to be bona fide relative clauses. The examples without such noun phrases may be relics of older forms which had some filler pronoun for example 'What is it, your name?' which deleted the same way am fear allegedly disappeared.
Case 4 and case 5 both apply to elements outside the scope of Keenan and Comrie's accessibility hierarchy. Case 4 relativizes adverbs, and case 5 seems to operate on interrogative particles. Calling case 4 and case 5 relativizing strategies certainly does not violate the hierarchy constraints, yet somehow Keenan and Comrie's exposition fails to account completely for Gaelic data. If the accessibility hierarchy truly reflects a psychological capacity of humans to more quickly apprehend clauses formed from different syntactic units, then there conceivably ought to be a hierarchy of all sorts of phrases. Gaelic evidently accesses more positions through relative strategies than those listed on the hierarchy. Although Welsh, another Celtic language is discussed in Keenan and Comrie's article, Gaelic unfortunately is not. Welsh may or may not have relativization strategies analogous to the cases 4 and 5 of Gaelic, but if it does, Keenan and Comrie understandably ignore them as irrelevant.

Case 6, objects of comparison: Objects of comparison are the lowest, or least accessible, position on the hierarchy. Strange to say, in Gaelic, every single comparative or superlative noun phrase shows overtones of the relative clause.

(67) Chuala e a' chaileag as bòidhche a' seinn.

heard he the girl who is beautiful (comp) at singing

'He heard the most beautiful girl singing (Mullally 1993c, p. 44).'</n
The critical word is as, derived from a + is, the relative pronoun and the copula. For some unfathomable reason, the superlative noun phrase 'the most beautiful girl' has the literal form 'the girl who is most beautiful.' Unfathomable since the underlying form is ungrammatical.

(68) * is a' chaileag bòidhche (* is a' chaileag bòidheach)

be the girl beautiful (comp) beautiful
'The girl is most beautiful (is beautiful)'  

Gaelic adjectives do not distinguish comparative versus superlative, thus bòidhche is the glossed as a comparative form.  

The copula should not predicate adjectives, that is the territory of tha, the substantive verb 'to be'. Idiomatic expressions do exist which have retained the copula (see (7)) and most likely the copula survived in the object of comparison construction because it hides in a combined form, as. Indeed, there is no corresponding combined form of the relative pronoun plus tha.  

Comparative, as opposed to superlative, constructions utilize a slightly different combined form, nas.  

(69) Tha mi nas glice na mo bhean:  
be I thing which is wiser than my wife  
'I am wiser than my wife.'  

Nas derives from ni + a + is, 'thing' + relative pronoun + copula. Now tha is misbehaving, predicating a relative clause which is the domain of is (see example (20)). The most likely analysis for the strange behavior of tha in this case, is to claim that case 6 clauses are actually adjectival phrases. With this claim, tha ought to predicate both comparative and superlative phrases. However, contrary to expectations, as clauses do not act as adjective phrases, whereas nas clauses do.  

(70) Tha mi nas miosa (an-diugh).  
be I thing which is worse today  
'I am worse (today) (Mullally 1993c, p. 44).'  

(71) * Tha mi as miosa.  
'I am the worst.'  

Superlative clauses appear with the 'se construction:
(72) 'Se an rathad seo as fhaisge.

it's the road this which is nearer

'This road is the nearest (Black 1992, p. 183).'

Case 6 clauses refuse to behave properly in any sense. 'Se constructions equate two noun phrases, thus one one expects them to attract nas, the relative with the incorporated noun, yet the data reveals the opposite. Tha predicates adjectives and not noun phrases, yet nas, with its incorporated noun appears in the predicate of tha sentences. Worse yet, the involvement of is in these relativized forms, as and nas is inexplicable given the usage of the copula. Presumably there is a nice syntactic explanation, yet to hazard a guess without more data is folly.

Case 6 is the only productive scheme to express comparison in Gaelic, but in terms of the accessibility hierarchy, the domain of case 6 is not exactly objects of comparison. In other words, case 6 does not extract the object of comparison and relativize it. Gaelic does not have a strategy for relativizing the object of comparison.

(73) * mo bhean a tha mi nas glice na

my wife whom be I thing which is wiser than

'my wife, whom I am wiser than'

Probably the relative pronoun hidden in the comparative phrase interferes with further relativization. In any event, case 6 requires explication far beyond the range of this paper.

Summary: Gaelic relative clauses conform to the three claimed universals of Keenan and Comrie's accessibility constraints. However, the accessibility constraints do not fully account for Gaelic data. For Gaelic, at least, other types of phrases are candidates for relativization. The six strategies listed in table 3, below, represent quite an arsenal of syntactic processes. Not all of them can be rendered by relative clauses
in English, indeed some of them do not resemble relative clauses in any way except for their use of the relative pronoun.

Table 3: strategy +/- case dependence in affirm. cl. dependence in neg. cl. hierarchy domain coreference?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>case</th>
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<td>-case</td>
<td>indep.</td>
<td>dep.</td>
<td>SU, DO</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
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<td>dep.</td>
<td>dep.</td>
<td>IO, OBL, GEN</td>
<td>no</td>
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<td>indep.</td>
<td>dep.</td>
<td>IO, OBL, GEN</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>case 4</td>
<td>-case</td>
<td>indep.</td>
<td>dep. SU, DO, IO, OBL, GEN</td>
<td>no</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>case 5</td>
<td>-case</td>
<td>indep.</td>
<td>dep.</td>
<td>SU, DO</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>case 6</td>
<td>-case</td>
<td>indep.</td>
<td>indep.</td>
<td>OCOMP ‡</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Also applies to phrases not on the accessibility hierarchy.
‡ Used with objects of comparison, although technically it does not relativize them.

This paper is meant to be a sketch of the different strategies, hopefully with enough support to motivate the division of Gaelic relative clauses into six cases. Syntactic explanations have been brushed over in order to limit the scope of the paper. In-depth explanations of the phenomena of Gaelic relative clauses appears a promising topic for future research.
References


