Diachronic, lexicographical and corpus perspectives on some Irish Gaelic partitives

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Irish Gaelic is rich in partitive structures, and this paper intends to discuss certain diachronic, lexicographical and corpus aspects of some of these. As literature on this topic is scarce (but see Bayda 2018 and Kane 2015), the data are collected from dictionaries (especially the *New English-Irish Dictionary – NEID –* at focloir.ie and the *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language – eDIL –* at https//dil.ie), and the *Corpus of Contemporary Irish* (https://www.gaois.ie/en/corpora/monolingual/). It is not the aim of this paper to argue for the categorization of the discussed structures as partitive or pseudo-partitive; for example, Bayda's argument that the *cuid* possessive construction is a pseudo-partitive one (2018: 52) is accepted. Rather, the focus of this study is to study the variation that is present in these structures in contemporary usage.

The structures to be covered are the following:

A) The structure describing the degree of knowledge of a language

> (1) *Tá   beagán Fraincise   agam*
>
> be.SUBST[1]   little French.GEN.SG   at.me
> 'I have (= I know) a little French.'
>   Literally: 'Is (substantive verb) a little of French at me.'

In (1), *Fraincise* is the genitive singular of *Fraincis* 'French'.
Lexicographical and corpus evidence is presented to show that the gen. sg. is still used in this type of structure – at least in written Irish.

B) Nouns denoting body parts in constructions with *cuid* 'part, portion'[2]

This type is exemplified in (2).

(2) *a cuid gruaige*

  her part   hair.GEN.SG
'her hair'
 Lit. 'her part of hair',

In (2), *gruaige* is the gen. sing. of *gruaig* 'hair'.
Corpus evidence shows that there is variation between constructions with the possessive pronoun + *cuid* + gen. of body part, as seen in (2), and possessive pronoun + body part as seen in (3):

(3) *a   gruaig*
   her   hair.NOM.SG.
'her hair'

However, the frequency of use of the two structures is different with various body parts, and this paper presents a tentative explanation for this type of variation.

C) A type of phrase with **personal numerals** (which behave like nouns) that are used for counting people, as in (4) and (5), with *cailíní* in (5) being the gen. pl. of *cailín* 'girl'.
(4) triúr
    'three people/persons'

(5) triúr cailíní   three girl.GEN.PL   'three girls'
  Lit. 'three people/persons of girls'

From the semantic point of view, there seems to be a whole – part relationship expressed in some phrases in which the personal numerals are used. An example for one of these types can be seen in (5); and the paper discusses corpus evidence for another type below. This is the equivalent of English phrases such as 'one of us', 'two of us', 'three of us', i.e. 'X persons of us', which can be expressed with two different structures:
(6)   *triúr againn*

      three   at.us
      'three of us'
or
(7)   *triúr dínn*
       three from.us
      'three of us'

In (6), *againn* is the 1st person plural **prepositional pronoun form** of the preposition *ag* 'at', and in (7) *dínn* is the 1st person plural **prepositional pronoun form** of the preposition de 'from'. The same two structures can be used for 'X of you' and 'X of them' as well (the latter could also refer to things).

Corpus evidence is presented to show that although there is variation, one of these structures makes up more than 90% of all the examples.

References

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[1] In Irish, as in Celtic languages in general, the basic word order is VSO.
[2] Bayda (2018) glosses *cuid* as 'part', and this is the first meaning given in *FGB* as well; thus, this equivalent is going to be used in this article.