In this paper I argue for a unified treatment of the particle ann as a stativizing aspect operator in Scottish Gaelic. The particle ann, traditionally called a ‘stative’ particle when it marks verbal predicates, can also mark nominal predicates. To date, no analysis has satisfactorily explained the connection between the two uses. In this paper I give a principled semantic account of why these two phenomena are represented by the same morphophonological piece in the language.

Traditional grammars (e.g., Calder (1923)) do not explain why a particle which appears to mark stativity should also mark some nominal predicates. Verbs in Gaelic can take one of several aspectual particles, including imperfective (ag). (For syntactic analyses of these phenomena, see especially Ramchand (1993a and forward).) Certain verbs of bodily position in Gaelic can also take ann (inflected below for person and number). With these verbs, a speaker can distinguish between a dynamic reading and a stative one by using the imperfective or stative particle, respectively. For instance, the verb suidh ‘sit’ can be used with either of these particles, as shown in (1) and (2). (The “verbal noun” is a gerundive form of the verb; in (2) note that its form can change due to consonant mutation triggered by the preceding element.)

(1) Tha mi a’ suidhe.
be.pres 1s imperfective sit.verbal_noun
‘I am [in the process of] sitting down.’

(2) Tha mi nam shuide.
be.pres 1s stative.poss.1s sit.verbal_noun
‘I am seated.’

The same particle also distinguishes individual-level uses of nominal predicates (with the copula) from stage-level uses (with the verb ‘be’ and the aspectual particle), as seen in (3) and (4).

(3) Is boireannach i.
cop.pres woman 3sf
‘She is a woman [not a man].’

(4) Tha i na boireannach a nisde.
be.pres 3sf stative.poss.3sf woman now
‘She is a woman now [not a child].’

Interestingly, we do not see the same particle in adjectival predicates; the individual-level vs. stage-level distinction is expressed by use of the copular construction or the construction with ‘be’:

(5) Is còir Alaig.
cop.pres kind Alec
‘Alec is kind [by nature].’

(6) Tha Alaig còir an diugh.
be.pres Alec kind today
‘Alec is [being] nice today.’

Cram (1982) was the first to explicitly argue that the particle ann was an aspectual particle rather than a preposition. His conclusion was that ann is merely a surface form of ag that appears with nominal predicates, and that this particle (along with ‘be’) gets deleted entirely in adjectival predicates. It is clear, however, that ag and ann have different semantics when used with verbal predicates; there is no principled reason why this should be assumed to be one and the same particle, or why only one form should surface with nominal predicates.

I argue that we are dealing with three types of predicates in Scottish Gaelic (across eventive verbs, mixed (bodily position) verbs, stative verbs, nominal predicates, and adjectival predicates):
A enduring states—no aspectual marking (includes stative verbs; copular nominal and copular adjectival predicates)

B dynamic events—progressive aspectual marker *ag* (includes eventive verbs; bodily position verbs in eventive readings)

C stative events—stative aspectual marker *ann* (includes stativized bodily position verbs and stage-level nominal predicates) (I call these ‘stative events’ for lack of a better term; we might also think of them as ‘stage-wise’ or ‘static events’.)

We would expect adjectival predicates with ‘be’, as they are not marked for predicate type B or C, to be interpretable in either manner, and this is indeed borne out in the data—by itself, *Tha Alec còir* as in (8) can have either nuance—‘Alec is being kind right now/today’ or ‘Alec is kind these days/Alec is in a kind stage’.

I follow Katz (1997, 2000) by arguing that (what I am calling) enduring states contain no event argument; then ‘dynamic events’ in this system contain a progressive event argument and, importantly, ‘stative’ events contain a stative (or static, or stage-wise) event argument. In Scottish Gaelic, in the aspects I am discussing here, each aspectual particle is the overt realization of its respective Asp head, which is the operator. The progressive and stative functional heads would be interpreted in the following manner:

(7) PROGRESSIVE: \( \lambda t \exists e [\text{Prog}(e) \land t \subseteq \text{run-time}(e)] \)

(10) STATIVE: \( \lambda t \exists e [\text{Stat}(e) \land t = \text{time-off}(e)] \)

I argue that the three types of predicates listed above would have the following types of logical forms:

(11) *Alec is a doctor (Is dotair Alec).* \( \exists t[\text{doctor}(t,Alec) \land t = \text{now}] \)

*Alec knows French.* \( \exists t[\text{know}(t,Alec,French) \land t = \text{now}] \)

(12) *I am walking.* \( \exists e[\text{walk}(e,1) \land t \subseteq \text{run-time}(e) \land t = \text{now}] \)

*I am in the process of sitting down.* \( \exists e[\text{sit down}(e,1) \land t \subseteq \text{run-time}(e) \land t = \text{now}] \)

(13) *I am sitting down [i.e., seated].* \( \exists e[\text{sit down}(e,1) \land t = \text{run-time}(e) \land t = \text{now}] \)

*Alec is (being) a doctor (Tha Alec na dhotair).* \( \exists e[\text{doctor}(e,Alec) \land t = \text{run-time}(e) \land t = \text{now}] \)

It has been so far unexplained why the particle *ann* appears where it does (and not elsewhere) in Scottish Gaelic. The present analysis explains the appearance of this particle in two places, giving a principled semantic account where other analyses have had to resort to stipulation.

References


