# The 'Emphatic' Pronoun in Scottish Gaelic 

Gavin Bembridge
Scottish Gaelic has a class of pronouns that are said to add emphasis to an utterance (Adger 2010a). Emphatic pronouns are morphologically complex and consist of a basic pronoun (e.g., mi 1SG) followed by a morpheme that seemingly encodes emphasis (i.e., $-s e,-e,-s a,-$ san). These pronouns are given in (1):
(1) mi-se (1SG) | sinn-e (1PL) || thu-sa (2SG)| sibh-se (2PL) || e-san (3SG.M) |i-se (3SG.F) |iad-san (3PL)

Bossi (2022) has argued that emphatic pronouns are contrastive focus-marked pronouns that invoke alternatives to the pronoun's referent, along the lines of Rooth (1992), and analyzes them as in (2a).
(2) a. [ $\phi \mathrm{P} \mathrm{mi}[\mathrm{FOC}-\mathrm{se} /-\mathrm{san}]]$
$\begin{array}{lll}\text { b. Phog } & \text { mi-se } & \text { Ealasaid } \\ \text { kiss.PAST } & \text { 1SG-EMPH } & \text { Elizabeth } \\ \text { 'I kissed Elizabeth.' } & \end{array}$
(2b), for example, could be interpreted in context as 'only I (and not John) kissed Elizabeth', where John is an alternative person who could have potentially kissed her but did not. Bossi's analysis predicts that emphatic pronouns should be infelicitous in contexts incompatible with focus. However, these pronouns do appear in focus-incompatible contexts such as 'out-of-the-blue' utterances. Consider a scenario in which a random stranger approaches someone and introduces themselves for the first time as in (3):

| (3) a. 'S | $\mathrm{mi}^{*}(-\mathrm{se})$ | Tormod. | b. \# $\left[I_{\text {Foc }}\right]$ am Norman |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
|  |  |  |  |
|  | cop.PRES | 1SG-EMPH | Norman |

No matter how it is marked, (contrastive) focus works by invoking mutually shared knowledge of one or more alternatives (Erteschik-Shir 1997). In an out-of-the-blue context, no such knowledge has yet been established as part of the Common Ground (e.g., Chafe 1976) and so there are no accessible alternatives. Thus, if the pronoun in (3a) were truly contrastively focused as Bossi claims, then we would expect it to be pragmatically odd, like the focused pronoun in (3b). Instead, it is actually the non-emphatic pronoun that is infelicitous in (3a), falsifying Bossi's prediction. Clearly then, the notions of emphasis and (contrastive) focus do not coincide - and if emphatic pronouns do not mark focus, what is their function?

Based on the syntactic distribution of 'emphatic' pronouns, I argue that they are strong pronouns in the sense of Cardinaletti \& Starke (1994), who argue that strong pronouns: may occur in clefts (4a), necessarily have a human referent (4b), can be coordinated (4c), and can be the referent of a relative clause (4d).


On the assumption that morphemes are the heads of syntactic categories, Cardinaletti \& Starke (1994) contend that strong pronouns must contain one more morpheme than their weak counterparts. Accordingly, I argue that the 'emphatic' morpheme can be understood as an animacy head within the DP whose presence or absence correlates with a pronoun's strength or weakness. Consider the proposed analysis in (5).
(5) a. strong: [DP [AnimacyP -se/-san [ $\phi \mathrm{P} \mathrm{mi}]]$ ] b. weak: [DP [ $\phi \mathrm{P} \mathrm{mi}]$ ]

The function of this morpheme, then, is not to add emphasis but rather to add an obligatory [+human] interpretation to strong pronouns, whereas weak pronouns, which lack this morpheme, need not necessarily have a human referent.

This analysis further supports the idea that it is necessary to recognize distinct pronoun types which are defined morpho-syntactically (Cardinaletti \& Starke 1994; Déchaine \& Wiltschko 2002), rather than treating the notion of a pronoun as a linguistic primitive. Importantly, the proposed analysis also addresses
the noted general scarcity of generative work on Scottish Gaelic morphosyntax and on the grammatical behaviour of Scottish Gaelic emphatic pronouns in particular (Adger 2010b).

## References

Adger, David. 2010a. Gaelic morphology. In Moray Watson \& Michelle Macleod (eds.), The Edinburgh Companion to the Gaelic Language, 283-303. Edinburgh University Press.
Adger, David. 2010b. Gaelic syntax. In Moray Watson \& Michelle Macleod (eds.), The Edinburgh Companion to the Gaelic Language, 304-351. Edinburgh University Press.
Bossi, Madeline. 2022. N-effects are not-P-effects: Pronoun competition in Scottish Gaelic. Natural Language \& Linguistic Theory 40. 425-445
Cardinaletti, Anna \& Michal Starke. 1994. Typology of structural deficiency on the three grammatical classes. University of Venice Working papers in Linguistics 2(4). 41-109.
Chafe, Wallace. 1976. Givenness, contrastiveness, definiteness, subjects, topics and point of view. In Charles N. Li (Ed.), Subject and Topic, 27-55. Academic Press.
Déchaine, Rose-Marie \& Martina Wiltschko. 2002. Decomposing pronouns. Linguistic Inquiry 33. 409443.

Erteschik-Shir, Nomi. 1997. The dynamics of focus structure. Cambride University Press.
Rooth, Mats. 1992. A theory of focus interpretation. Natural Language Semantics 1. 75-116.

