


Emphatic subject stranding VP ellipsis (verum focus).

April 11, 2011. Andrew Carnie with Muriel Fisher for Andrew Dowd.

Few notes on glossing and elicitation.

- The gloss dep stands for dependent verb form, which more common in Gaelic than in Irish
- Ann an is "in a" or "in", the "an" here is NOT the definite determiner it's a reduplication of ann.
- 'na is "in his"
- 'ga is "at his"
- Bold italic is meant to indicate primary stress, the forms with verum focus all had two pitch contours, with stress equal stress on the first syllable of the verb (not on the particle) and on the pronoun:

Cha robh mi

/xa 'ro: 'mi/

The Data

1) A: Cha robh thu a' feuchainn ri jobaichean
neg be.past.dep you prog trying to jobs

a chuir ann **an** cunnart, an robh?
tran put.vn in danger, Q be.past

'You weren't trying to put jobs at risk, were you?'

B: Cha robh *mi*
Neg be.past.dep
'I *wasn't*.'

I explained the radio show context to Muriel and this was the first example she came up with. Without prompting, she noted right away that this is otherwise unacceptable except "as part of an argument" which I take to mean verum focus. I also elicited these forms:

B: Cha robh mise
Neg be.past.dep
'*I* wasn't (but someone else was).'

B: Cha robh
'No (neutral).'

2) A: Seall orm
Look on.1s
'Look at me.'

B: Nach *eil* mi.
Neg.Q.be.dep I
'*Wasn't I?*'

It was really hard to elicit this form since the preceding sentence didn't have a be-verb in it. She said that this form felt like something younger speakers might say – which in turn lead to a discussion of the weird ellipsis given below the line a couple of pages on. Stress in this form was clearly on *eil* and she refused to accept stress on the pronoun. However, she was happy with the answer below:

B: Cha sheall *mi*
Neg look.fut.dep me
'*I will not.*'

So what I took from the above was that she was ok with a real negative but not with a question or negative question (even when posed rhetorically). This turns out to be wrong – see the data further on.

3) A. Tha mi a' sgrìobhadh sìos an sgeulachd seo
be.pres I prog write.vn down the story this
'I'm writing down this story.'

B: (First response)
A' *bheil*
'*Are you?*'

This was the example I got when I gave her the context that I was telling her I was writing down the story but that I was actually checking my email. And I wanted her to respond "Are you? (really)". She said that this is what she would say if she wanted to express disbelief in what I was saying

B: (Second response)
Chan eil *thu*
Neg be.pres you
'*You aren't.*'

When I asked her when she'd use this, she said this was a contradiction to my statement rather than expressing disbelief. She kept saying "You only say the pronoun when you're having an argument".

4) A: An sgurr iad?
 Q stop them
 'Did they stop?'

(Context given. B is telling A about how someone nearly got run over by a car at a nearby (notorious) 4 way stop where there are is a ton of accidents. And then A asks the above)

B: **Feumaidh** 'ad
 must.fut they
 'They *must*.'

Don't be confused by the future here, SG lacks present tense for all verbs except be. They use the future to express present habitual meanings. Muriel explicitly rejected "Feumaidh *iad*" (contrasting with your Irish example.) But I asked her to put it in the negative and she freely gave me a stranded pronominal subject as below

B: Cha fheum **iad**
 Neg must.fut.dep them
 'They don't have to.'

This made me think for a moment that she simply didn't allow it in questions or positives, but see examples 8, 9, 10 and 11.

5) A: An do smaoinich thu riamh gum biodh Sarah
 Q past think.dep you ever that be.cond Sara

Palin 'na Cheann-Suidhe.
 Palin in.her.poss President
 'Did you ever think Sarah Palin would be president?'

B: Cha do smaoinich **mi**
 Not past thought I
 'I *didn't* (first response).'

B: Cha do **smaoinich**, cha do smaoinich **mi**
 Not past think.dep, not past think I
 'I didn't, I *didn't* (prompted to parallel your Irish example).'

6) A: Cha mhòr nach eil mi trì fichead
 Not big neg.rel be.pres.dep I three twenty
 'I'm almost sixty.'

B: Chan eil **thu**
 Neg be.pres.dep you
 'You are *not* (immediate answer).'

- 7) A: Tha mise ag iarraidh toit
 be.pres I.emph prog ask cigarette
 'I want a cigarette.'
- B: A' **bheil**
 Q be.pres.dep
 'Do you?' (*A' bheil **thu**)
- B: Chan eil **thu**
 Neg be.pres.dep you
 'You *don't*.'

Sorry I meant to ask if this means "you *do* not" or "you *do not*", but we got distracted. Instead I asked her if she could ever think of a case where she'd use the pronoun with a positive form rather than a negative, since all the above examples only seem to have it in the negative. She immediately generated the following examples:

- 8) (Context arguing)
- A: Chan eil mi a' dol a phogadh Bob
 Neg be.pres.dep I prog go trans kiss.vn Bob
 'I'm not going to kiss Bob.'
- B: Tha **thu**
 be.pres you
 'You *are*.'
- 9) This one is an argument with back and forth:
- A: Chan eil mi ag iarraidh tioclaid
 Neg e.pres.dep I prog ask chocolate
 'I don't want any chocolate.'
- B: **Tha thu**
 be.pres you
 'You *do*.'
- A: Chan **eil** **mi**
 Neg be.pres.dep I
 I *don't*
- B: **Tha thu**
 be.pres you
 'You *do*.'

It was in the examples immediately that I finally noticed that she was actually putting equal stress on the first syllable of the verb and the pronoun. Which is why there is bold

italic on the verb as well as on the pronouns. I didn't re-elicite 1-8 to check this, but I'm pretty sure that's what she was doing.

10) A: Chan fheum mi a dhol dhachaidh gu deich
Neg must.fut.dep I tran go home to 10

uaireann

o'clock

'I don't need to go home until 10 o'clock.'

B: **Feumaidh tu**
must.future you
'You *must*.'

11) This one is fun because it has an inflected Prep as a subject, which is present in the VF context:

A: Nach robh aca ri stad?
Neg be.past.dept at.3pl to stop
'Didn't they have to stop?'

B: Bha (natural, neutral response)
be.past
'Yes/They did.'

A: Cha **robh aca** (A contradicting B above)
Neg be.past.dep at.3pl
'NO/they *did*.'

B: **Bha aca** (A repeating his/her assertion in the face of B's contradiction)
be.past at.3pl
'Yes/they *did*.'

The following data is not directly connected to your question, but Muriel noted a strange Ellipsis that is prevalent among younger speakers that is completely ungrammatical for people of her generation:

12) Mummy: Ith do dhinnear
Eat.imp you dinner

Old Fashioned: Tha mi a' dol 'ga ithe
be.pres I prog go at.3sm.poss eat
'I'm going to eat it (I'm going to at its eating).'

	Modern	Tha mi a' dol 'ga be.pres I prog go at.3sm.poss 'I'm going to (I'm going to at its).'
13)	Mummy:	Dean do leabaidh Make.imp your bed
	Old Fashioned	Tha mi a' dol 'ga deanamh
	Modern	Tha mi a' dol 'ga
14)	Mummy:	Nigh d' aodainn Clean your face
	Old fashioned	Tha mi a' dol 'ga nighe
	Modern	Tha mi a' dol 'ga