

Demonic Negation, Responsive Ellipsis, and Negative Fragment Answers in Modern Irish

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1. Introduction: what fragment answers and answer particles have in common

This paper is an analysis of negative fragment answers (NFAs) in Modern Irish. More specifically, I will concentrate on a peculiar kind of NFAs, those derived from the emphatic negative construction known as ‘Demonic Negation’ (DemNeg) from McCloskey (2009, 2018). These fragment answers are employed in response to yes-no questions, rather than constituent questions, and feature a negative marker which is derived from the word ‘devil’ or ‘demon’, followed by another constituent. The negative expression is derived from the phrase *do dheamhan/don diabhal* (‘to a demon’ or ‘to the devil’) but it is attested without the preposition *do(n)* as early as the 17th century¹. DemNeg is thus a former negative idiom which has grammaticalized into a negative marker. (1) is an example of a demonic NFA:

- (1) A: An mbuail-eann² Seán duine (ar bith)?
C.INT hit-HAB.PRS Seán person on earth
‘Does Seán hit anybody?’
B: Dheamhan duine!
demon person
‘Not a (single) man!’

What I will propose is that these fragments provide NFAs to yes-no questions, rather than constituent questions, because DemNeg is base-generated as a left-peripheral sentential negator, which has wide scope over all of the lower material, and not just narrow scope over the XP to its right. In this sense, Irish NFAs based upon DemNeg constitute a window on the encoding of negation in the left periphery, and on the nature of the relation between the left peripheral polarity and the PolP which is found in the TP layer, which was proposed as early as Laka’s (1990) work.

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¹ The earliest attestations I could find are in the *Corpas Stairiúil na Gaeilge* of the Royal Irish Academy, which can be consulted at <http://corpas.ria.ie/>. The corpus spans the years 1600-1926, so it may well be that the construction is much older. Unfortunately, due to its expressive and mildly vulgar character the construction has rarely been attested in writing before the late 19th century, as is expected for an emphatic negator which is mostly employed in the colloquial language.

² Celtic languages present consonant mutations as part of their grammars. These morphophonological effects convey grammatical information of various kinds, as the result of syntagmatic interactions between words or morphemes. Only the word initial changes, lenition and nasalisation, will be noted here, and they will only be discussed when they are relevant to the purposes of the present paper. Otherwise, the reader can disregard them.

Holmberg (2016) has explored the hypothesis that particle-based answers to yes-no questions (YNQs) are derived in a way which is comparable to fragment answers to constituent questions: answer particles, which carry positive, negative, or reversing features, are merged in SpecFocP. Answers employing these particles are elliptical structures, where the IP below the answer particle, which is inherited from the question, is elided under Merchant's semantic condition on identity, E-givenness. In parallel with Merchant's (2004) analysis of fragment answers, ellipsis takes place after the head of Foc^o, which is endowed with the [E] feature that triggers ellipsis in that model.

According to Holmberg, answer particles are endowed with [iNeg]/[uNeg] and [uAff] features, depending on whether they are negative or affirmative answer particles. Crucially, these features interact with the polarity that is inherited from the question, which is syntactically present below the answer particle, and which is deleted by fragment ellipsis. Thus, a fragment with a negative answer particle has the following structure:

- (2) Q: Is he coming?
 A: No.
 [FocP No_[iNeg] Foc^o_[E] [_{IP} he is [_{PolP} [_{Pol}] [_{VP} coming]]]]
-

YNQs have what Holmberg calls 'open polarity'. Since YNQs are essentially a request for a truth value for the proposition of the question, they come with an unvalued [Pol] feature, situated in the head of PolP, which is valued via Agree with the polar feature of the answer particle. In the case of (1), the [iNeg] on the negative answer particle provides a negative value for the lower [Pol], resulting in an Agree chain between the particle in Focus and the lower Pol^o. In line with Merchant's model, Foc^o is endowed with [E], which triggers ellipsis of the lower material under semantic identity.

What follows from a perspective such as Holmberg's is that, for languages that do have answer particles, at the strictly syntactic level there is no great difference between answer particles and fragment answers: both involve deletion of the material following the head of FocP, while the surviving fragment/particle sits in SpecFocP.

While the use of a single elliptical strategy for constituent and particle fragments may seem sensible, there is another strategy to derive answers to YNQs. Languages that employ of this strategy make use of the open polarity position inherited from the question and 'fill' it with either positive or negative polarity. Modern Irish is one such language.

2. Irish Responsive Ellipsis: making the best of PolP

Irish, like the other Celtic languages, lacks answer particles altogether. The strategy it resorts to for answers to YNQs can be described empirically as a repetition of the verb of the question, with either positive or negative polarity. As noted by Holmberg (2016), who provides an analysis of comparable phenomena in Finnish and Welsh, this strategy is employed by about half of the world's languages. Irish, a VSO language, expresses standard sentential negation in a very high syntactic position, on specialised preverbal heads which are generally considered to be complementisers (see McCloskey (2001) for an overview). Irish negation is only expressed in the left periphery and, as noted by Acquaviva (1996), any expression of negation below these negative complementisers is ungrammatical. Below is an example of a negative sentence in Modern Irish:

- (3) Ní bhuail-eann Seán duine (ar bith)
 C.NEG hit-PRS.HAB Seán person on earth
 'Seán doesn't hit anybody'

The Irish negative restriction is so pervasive that even monotone-decreasing quantifiers are only grammatical in the left periphery. This means that uttering the verbal complex formed by negative complementiser + finite verb (minus the subject) is the standard way to give a negative answer to a YNQ. An example of this answering strategy is provided below:

- (4) Q: An mbuaileann Seán duine ar bith?
C.INT hit-HAB.PRS Seán person on earth
'Does Seán hit anybody?'
- A: Ní bhuaileann.
C.NEG hit-HAB.PRS
'No' (lit. 'Doesn't hit')

McCloskey (2017) provides an interesting description of the syntax of Responsive Ellipsis, which is reprised by Bennet, Elfiner & McCloskey (2019). McCloskey's proposal is presented within a novel analysis of the derivation of Irish VSO, which involves movement of the finite verb to Pol^o, rather than T^o, and allows raising of the subject out of the vP layer to SpecTP. The model I am adopting here is then more similar to Laka's description of Basque, with PolP above TP, than Holmberg's structure for English with the reverse order³. Another key feature of McCloskey's model is that Pol^o represents the syntactic realisation of polarity and as such in a negative sentence it is endowed with interpretable negative features. The negative form of the complementiser results from Agree with the feature on the lower Pol^o, where negative polarity is encoded. Accordingly, the structure for (3), and for the NFA in (4A) above, is as in (5), where I omit movement operations for simplicity's sake:

- (5) [_{FinP} Ní_[uNeg] [_{PolP} bhuaileann_[iNeg] [_{TP} Seán T^o [_{vP} [_{DP} duine ar bith] v^o [_{vP} V^o]]]]]
-

In (5) I slightly modify McCloskey's approach and rename CP as FinP, following Rizzi's (1997) cartographic model. What follows from (5) is that the NFA in (4) is derived as ellipsis of the complement of Pol^o. (4A) is thus derived from (5) via ellipsis of the lower TP (including the subject in SpecTP, as desired), a welcome result given that in Holmberg's model for answer particles TP is the constituent that is deleted under Merchant's semantic identity.

What brings together Irish Responsive Ellipsis and answer particles, then, is that both strategies derive fragment answers to YNQs as ellipsis after a potent expression of polarity, which satisfies the request of the YNQ for a truth value for *p*. In the English case, the particle itself is responsible for introducing positive or negative polarity, which agrees with the lower PolP inherited from the question. In the Irish case illustrated above, it is the feature on Pol^o that interprets the higher polar feature of the complementiser, and it is that lower feature that provides the truth value for the proposition inherited from the question.

In a way, Irish and in general languages that repeat the verb of the question to answer YNQs make the best of the PolP of the sentence. Sentences with a finite element come with a dedicated expression of polarity, which is generally identified with the position of the finite verb itself, so it makes sense to exploit this standard, IP-level polar position when answering a YNQ. As mentioned above, one can think of YNQs as communicative contexts in which an interlocutor presents the Speaker with a proposition with a gap in it, an open polarity for which the Speaker is invited to provide a value. In some languages the answering strategy consists in filling the polar gap and presenting the interlocutor with the correct value for the open polarity of the question (the one that makes the resulting proposition true in the actual world). Verbal answers are essentially tied with the general tendency for answers to mirror the informational packaging of the question, creating a symmetry which is also syntactic between the two related conversational turns.

On the other hand, languages that employ answer particles follow another path: they unify the ellipsis strategies for fragment answers and answers to YNQs, at the added computational cost of the Agree relation between the answer particle and the lower Pol^o. In a way, answer particles are nothing but an expedient that allows the Speaker to treat a YNQ like a constituent question, exploiting the strategy used for constituent fragment answers across the board.

³ For brevity I also ignore McCloskey's proposal that Irish has a double TP structure, with one TP above PolP and one below it. In his analysis, the higher TP is responsible for the tense inflection of the complementiser and hosts preverbal tense markers.

This reasoning will play a role in the discussion of DemNeg, an emphatic strategy for NFAs which presents features of both answer particles and fragment answers.

2.1. Irish constituent fragment answers

As is known from the literature, Irish employs special so-called ‘relativising’ complementisers when an A’-dependency is formed across FinP (McCloskey 2002). The leniting *aL* complementiser appears when movement takes place to the left periphery, while the nasalising *aN* complementiser is used when the element at the top of the dependency is base-generated in the left periphery, with a resumptive element at the bottom. Following McCloskey (2002, 2009), in the *aN* case the relation between the item at the top and the resumptive element is mediated by a null *Op* in SpecCP/FinP:

- (6) a. [FP Duine_i [FinP a [PolP bhuail-eann [TP [DP Seán] T° [vP t_i v°]]]]]
 person aL hit-HAB.PRS Seán
- b. [FP Duine_i [FinP Op [Fin° a] [PolP mbuail-eann [TP [DP Seán] T° [vP [DP é_i] v°]]]]]
 person aN hit-HAB.PRS Seán him
 ‘A man whom Seán hits’

As a consequence, with Focus movement the *aL* complementiser is employed. If we follow Merchant’s (2004) suggestion that fragment answers to constituent questions are derived by ellipsis after *Foc°*, then we can derive Irish fragment answers as follows, from the underlying syntax in (7A):

- (7) A: Cé a bhuail-eann duine?
 who aL hit-HAB.PRS person
 ‘Who hits a person?’
- B: Seán a ~~bhuail-eann duine~~
 Seán aL hit-HAB.PRS person
 ‘Seán (that hits a person)’
 [FocP Seán_i *Foc°* [FinP aL [PolP bhuail-eann [TP t_i T° [vP [DP duine] v°]]]]]

It follows, then, that Irish employs two different kinds of ellipsis for answers to constituent questions and to YNQs: regular sluicing-like ellipsis after *Foc°* for the former, and ellipsis after the *Pol°* in the IP layer for the latter.

With the details of Irish Responsive Ellipsis and constituent ellipsis in order, we can now turn to the specific case exemplified in (1) and describe the behaviour of NFAs based upon DemNeg. I will begin by reviewing the two forms in which DemNeg can be found in Irish and I will propose a syntactic analysis for the construction.

3. The syntax of Demonic Negation

The derivation of NFAs, as with any other kind of ellipsis, imposes a semantic identity condition upon the elided portion of the sentence. For ellipsis to function, the [E]-bearing head that triggers ellipsis must be defined, for it is the material that follows this syntactic position that gets PF-deleted by ellipsis.

In a way, demonic NFAs are at the intersection of Responsive Ellipsis and constituent fragments. On the one hand, they are used in response to YNQs and have a negative element as an integral part of their structure, thus presenting two important features of (negative) answers to YNQs. On the other hand, *dheamhan* is followed by an XP, which means that their structure is more akin to that of constituent fragments at the syntactic level. This latter fact leads one to hypothesise that demonic NFAs may in fact involve Focus movement, just like constituent fragments in general. This is the hypothesis that will be pursued here.

A few broader considerations about the syntax of DemNeg are in order here. Non-elliptical DemNeg comes in two forms, which I call DemNeg+XP and bare DemNeg, illustrated in (8a) and (8b) respectively.

- (8) a. Dheamhan duine a bhuaileann Seán
 demon person aL hit-HAB.PRS Seán
 ‘Not a man does Seán hit’
- b. Dheamhan a mbuaileann Seán duine
 demon aN hit-HAB.PRS Seán person
 ‘Indeed, Seán doesn’t hit anybody’

DemNeg+XP is the basis for demonic NFAs. In its full form, it is a typical Irish reduced cleft such as the one exemplified in (7B) above. The complementiser employed here is the *aL* complementiser, which is an indication that movement has taken place. One is then naturally led to infer that DemNeg+XP moves to the left periphery as a constituent, triggering the occurrence of the *aL* complementiser. Nonetheless, this hypothesis is made problematic by the other face of the coin, namely bare DemNeg, exemplified in (8b). In this construction, *dheamhan* appears on its own in the left periphery, without a constituent following it. Crucially, the complementiser that is found in this construction is the *aN* one, which means that no movement has taken place and that *dheamhan* is base-generated in the left periphery. This raises two questions. The first is specific to the syntax of bare DemNeg: the presence of the *aN* complementiser also implies that a resumptive chain has been formed across Fin°. Nevertheless, no resumptive element can be found in the lower clause. Due to reasons of space and to the fact that this problem is less relevant to the subject of this paper, I leave it for future research, but for now let it suffice to note that such cases of ‘null resumption’ are not uncommon in Irish. McCloskey (2002) notices that null resumption is obligatory with certain left-peripheral adjuncts. Most notably, and most importantly for the syntax of DemNeg in general, null resumption with the *aN* complementiser is obligatory with reason adverbials and *wh*-words corresponding to *why*, precisely those which Rizzi (2001) has argued to be base-generated in the Spec of a dedicated left-peripheral position (identified with IntP in the reference cited above). Bare DemNeg thus constitutes evidence for the idea that *dheamhan*, too, is base-generated in some position in the left periphery, rather than moved from below.

The second question, more relevant to this paper, is one of constituency: do *dheamhan* and the following XP form a single constituent? This question is crucial, because from a positive answer to it, it would follow that in the DemNeg+XP case, *dheamhan* is not a constituent negation in the extended projection of the moved XP, but rather a high negator followed by Focus movement of the XP to its right⁴. The fact that DemNeg is a phenomenon that only occurs in the left periphery means that most of the usual constituency tests cannot be performed on this construction. Still, some important evidence can be gathered that supports the idea that *dheamhan* is not constituent negation, but rather a high left-peripheral negator.

To begin with, one could wonder whether *dheamhan* is some sort of negative quantifier or determiner (akin to Italian *nessuno*). Of course, such determiners are part of the DP extended projection, which would make it *prima facie* impossible to suggest that *dheamhan* and the XP are two separate constituents. Nevertheless, that *dheamhan* is a negative determiner is very unlikely, because, as noted by Ó Siadhail (1980) and McCloskey (2009, 2018), the constituent that follows *dheamhan* does not have to be a NP. *Dheamhan* can also be followed by predicative adjectives, PPs, and verbal nouns, as illustrated below with an example taken from Ó Siadhail (1980:49):

- (9) A: Bhí siad siúd bocht
 be.PST they there poor
 ‘They were poor’
- B: Dheamhan bocht a bhí said siúd ariamh
 demon poor aL be.PST they there ever
 ‘They never were poor’

⁴ McCloskey (2009, 2018) also takes the XP to move separately to the right of *dheamhan*, but in his analysis the landing position is a second specifier of CP, while *dheamhan* sits in the first SpecCP, and not in a separate NegP. I thank James McCloskey (p.c.) and an anonymous reviewer for WCCFL40 for bringing this precedent to my attention.

Although *per se* it doesn't prove that *dheamhan* and the XP do not form one constituent, (9) makes it clear that *dheamhan* is more similar to a negative marker than to a negative determiner or quantifier, which could only occur with certain quantifiable categories.

Actually, bare DemNeg in and of itself constitutes evidence for the hypothesis that *dheamhan* is independent from the presence of another constituent and that it involves no movement; in fact, bare DemNeg is nothing but a special case of DemNeg+XP, where the XP is represented by the whole sentence that is negated. Moreover, we already know from bare DemNeg that *dheamhan* does not have to move to the left periphery but can be base-generated there. Given that the only differences between bare DemNeg and DemNeg+XP are the presence of a further constituent and of the *aL* complementiser in the latter case, the option that requires the least assumptions is to describe the DemNeg+XP case as movement of the XP to a position in the left periphery to the immediate right of *dheamhan*. This is also consistent with a classic minimalist approach, whereby movement only applies if it is necessary. The XP may have to move to Focus for information-structural reasons, but there would be no reason for *dheamhan* (a sentential negator, albeit a non-standard one) to be base-generated with narrow scope over the XP in the vP layer and then moved along with it the position in which it is normally base-generated. To merge a negative marker in that position makes even less sense in a language like Irish where, as mentioned, any negative element below FinP is ungrammatical.

Taking the lead from the initial considerations above, it is time to consider the exact shape of the syntax of DemNeg+XP, starting from the idea that the two components of the construction are two distinct constituents.

3.1. DemNeg as peripheral negation

Based on the comparison of bare DemNeg and DemNeg+XP, I propose that *dheamhan* sits in a dedicated position in the left periphery and that the position to which the XP to its right moves is SpecFocP⁵. As to the position of DemNeg itself, I identify it with a left peripheral NegP (or, possibly, PolP) which sits above Focus. The syntax of (8a) thus looks like (10):

(10) [_{TopicP} [_{NegP} *dheamhan* [_{FocP} [_{DP} *duine_i*] Foc^o [_{FinP} *aL* [_{PolP} *bhuaileann* [_{TP} [_{DP} *Seán*] T^o [_{vP} *t_i v^o*]]]]]]]]]]

That the left periphery hosts a polar projection is not an outlandish claim, in fact. To the best of my knowledge, its origin can be traced back to literature on negation that was produced in the '90s (and possibly initiated by Laka 1990), in which it was suggested that, in addition to a PolP in the IP layer, there is a higher position which scopes over the entire sentence and which is responsible for encoding its polarity at the syntactic level. This idea of sentence polarity, or in any case the idea that the left periphery hosts a polar or negative projection of some sort, has received considerable attention in much recent research on the syntax of negation (to mention a few, Aboh 2010, Poletto 2017, De Clercq 2020). The exact position of the PolP/NegP is not always the same across the works cited above, but very often it is either adjacent to Focus, or even identified with FocP (as suggested by De Clercq 2020). Sometimes,

⁵ A reviewer for WCCFL40 objected to the relevance of an earlier observation I had made about the fact that the XP adjacent to *dheamhan* receives stress. He notices that, while the demonic XP does sometimes receive stress, this is possible for most phrases in many syntactic positions and does not suffice to prove that the XP is focussed. Since the prosodic aspects of DemNeg require further research, I have decided not to include the data on stress for now. In general, the fact that the XP is not always stressed is not necessarily against the present analysis, given that following Benincà & Poletto (2004) stress in and of itself is not a reliable diagnostic for Focus (one more reason not to bring up Focus stress, in fact). Additionally, the same reviewer notes that the phrase that follows *dheamhan* is often given, which would argue against intrinsic Focus marking of the XP. This, on the other hand, I would tend not to see as an issue. The categories of given/new information and Topic/Focus do not always coincide, and in fact they tend to diverge precisely in the case of emphatic or nonstandard negation, including negative denials and metalinguistic negation, whose purpose is often to update or correct the information on material that is given. Larrivé (2018), for instance, claims that the main feature of metalinguistic negation (which is a possible interpretation of DemNeg) consists in a paradoxical information structure in which discourse-old material is treated as discourse-new by virtue of being focused and contrasted to the correcting material.

as in Aboh's (2010) analysis of negative particles in Gbe languages, it is the NegP itself that moves to SpecFocP.

What follows from (10) is that *dheamhan* always has the full sentence in its scope. It does not simply have narrow scope on the following XP, which separately moves to the right of *dheamhan*. In a way, demonic NFAs present features of both answer particles and fragment answers. On the one hand, the main expression of negation is found in the left periphery, rather than in the IP layer, and this marker negates the lower sentence by having it in its scope. This fact is the reason why DemNeg+XP works as an answer to YNQs: the proposition of the question is always in its scope, including of course the 'open' PolP, which satisfies the illocutionary demand for a polar specification. In this connection, it is interesting to notice that even the verbal noun of the main predicate can move to SpecFocP, with *do*-support in the lower clause and, in the case of transitive verbs, a case-marking preposition before the Theme (Ó Siadhail 1980):

- (11) A: An mbuail-eann Seán duine ar bith?
C.INT hit-HAB.PRS Seán person on earth
'Does Seán hit anybody?'
- B: Dheamhan bualadh a ~~rinne Seán ar duine ar bith~~
demon hitting aL did Seán on man on earth
'No hitting at all/Not a hit'

(11B) looks like a sort of piecemeal processing of sentential negation: the lexical verb (the semantic component of the predicate) moves to the left periphery, while Pol^o, filled by a dummy element, receives negative polarity by being in the scope of the negative marker. (11B) represents a remarkable intersection of the two strategies described in §1 (answer particles and verb repetition). As with answer particles, negative polarity is generated above the IP layer, and as with Responsive Ellipsis, the verb from the question is repeated. It is an expensive answering strategy which pays the price of emphasis in terms of a higher computational load.

Now that the components of the hypothesis are all in place and have been reasonably motivated, it is time to review some consequences of the analysis and to verify some predictions and expectations.

4. Some syntactic challenges

4.1. NPI licensing

The claim that DemNeg has wide scope over the lower clause might at first sight seem circular. One might think that the empirical starting point of the analysis (namely the fact that DemNeg+XP provides answers to YNQs) is taken as evidence for the wide scope of DemNeg over the whole sentence, including its PolP. Fortunately, the claim that *dheamhan* has wide scope over the lower clause and not just narrow scope over the adjacent XP is easily verified. In fact, the easiest way to test the scope of a negative or non-veridical marker is to verify whether it licenses polarity items.

Consider the Italian sentence below:

- (12) *Mica Gianni ha alzato un dito (bensì Luca)
mica Gianni has lifted a finger but Luca
'It wasn't Gianni who lifted a finger, but Luca'

(12) is ungrammatical because the presuppositional negative marker *mica*, which has contrastive meaning here, only scopes over the DP *Gianni* and not over the whole sentence. This means that the NPI phrase *alzare un dito*, 'lift a finger', which needs to be in the scope of a non-veridical operator, is unlicensed in (12), which crashes the derivation.

No such problem arises with DemNeg, as can be seen in (13), where the NPI *aon* is licensed in the lower sentence⁶:

- (13) Dheamhan tásc ná tuairisc a bhí le feiceáil ar **aon** channaí folmha
 demon report nor account aL was with seeing on any cans empty
 ‘No report nor account was to be seen on any empty cans’

In fact, DemNeg quite regularly licenses NPIs in its scope regardless of the presence of the adjacent XP, which is a clear indication of the fact that *dheamhan* has wide scope in the DemNeg+XP construction.

4.2. MaxElide

Despite the considerations in the final lines of §3.1., it is clear that responsive DemNeg is far more similar to fragment answers than it is to Responsive Ellipsis. The latter has a lower ellipsis site, while responsive DemNeg is a regular fragment answer that is generated by ellipsis after Foc°. Now, the question could be whether the two strategies can be conflated, namely whether we could have DemNeg plus Responsive Ellipsis, with Pol° as the point at which ellipsis takes place⁷. In other words, could (11B) take the form in (14) below?

- (14) Dheamhan bualadh a rinne ~~Seán ar duine ar bith~~
 demon hitting aL did Seán on man on earth
 ‘Not a hitting, did Seán do’

A form like (14) is not attested and, pending further research for confirmation, is not expected to be possible, either. The reason for this assumption lies in an observation made by Merchant (2008), which is exemplified with (15):

- (15) They attended a lecture on a Balkan language, but I don’t know which (*they did)

The reason (15) is ill-formed with the addition of *they did* (namely, with VP-ellipsis⁸ rather than sluicing) is tied to A’-movement. Merchant (2008) notices that when A’-movement occurs out of the ellipsis site, the largest possible constituent should be elided, a condition which the author names MaxElide. Wh-movement is a type of A’-movement, so sluicing in (15) takes precedence over VP-ellipsis, since sluicing is the ellipsis type that deletes the biggest constituent out of which the wh-item has been extracted. It is likely that MaxElide is also the reason why (14) is unattested and probably impossible: the XP that is adjacent to *dheamhan* has undergone Focus movement, meaning that fragment ellipsis (i.e. ellipsis of the FinP that follows Foc°, the largest constituent from which the XP has been extracted) is expected to be the only option for DemNeg+XP.

4.3. Fragment answers and bare DemNeg

Bare DemNeg can also provide fragment answers, in the form of (16):

⁶ (13) was retrieved from the *Gaois Corpus of Contemporary Irish*, which is available at <https://www.gaois.ie/en/> (last consulted on July 26th, 2022).

⁷ This question was indeed asked by a reviewer for WCCFL40, whom I thank for raising this point.

⁸ This is a fitting occasion to note that part of McCloskey’s (2017) paper is concerned with demonstrating that Irish Responsive Ellipsis is also used in non-responsive contexts that precisely mirror those in which English VP-ellipsis is employed. McCloskey convincingly argues that what the two ellipses have in common is that they take place after the point of the sentence in which polarity is encoded.

- (16) A: An mbuaileann Seán duine ar bith?
 C.INT hit-HAB.PRS Seán man on earth
 ‘Does Seán hit anybody?’
- B: Dheamhan é
 demon 3MSG
 ‘Not at all’

Bare DemNeg does not appear in isolation in fragment answers. Instead, the third person masculine pronoun *é* follows it in NFAs. At first sight, this fact seems problematic for my analysis; if *dheamhan* is a constituent on its own, then it should be expected not to require another element to provide a fragment answer. Nevertheless, I argue that there are two reasons behind (16B) that have nothing to do with *dheamhan* being a constituent or not.

The first reason why the construction in (16B) is indeed expected is that fragment ellipsis is triggered when some element moves to SpecFocP. Extraction of the fragment is then a necessary step that precedes fragment ellipsis. Given this condition, the present analysis is in a good position to explain the form of the NFA in (16B): since in the case of bare DemNeg *dheamhan* is not extracted, but base-generated in a dedicated projection in the left periphery (cf. §2), no movement to SpecFocP occurs, which means that ellipsis is not triggered. For ellipsis to take place, the pronoun *é* is moved (or, possibly, base-generated) in SpecFocP, enabling fragment ellipsis. As to the nature of *é*, I take it to be a sentence pro-form of the kind proposed by McCloskey (1996), an anaphoric element which is co-referential with the elided part of the sentence and which is independently attested in the language.

The second reason why (16B) is unproblematic for the present analysis is related to a general feature of negative markers. Negative adverbs tend not to be acceptable in isolation, i.e. without an overt argument to quantify over. This is also true of Italian *mica*, which has been mentioned above. *Mica* is an XP negator which can occur in the left periphery, a fact that has recently been analysed as Focus fronting (Magistro 2022). Moreover, since it is not clitic, it could be pronounced in isolation. Still, *mica* cannot provide an NFA even in cases in which it has wide scope over the lower sentence⁹:

- (17) A: Gianni ha colpito Luca
 Gianni has hit Luca
- B: Mica *(lo ha colpito)!
mica him has hit
 ‘On the contrary, he has not!’

To conclude, the fact that a negative marker cannot provide a NFA has nothing to do with being an XP negator, or with being part of the extended projection of another XP.

An interesting corollary to these considerations is that in theory MaxElide should have no effect in barring Responsive Ellipsis in (16): that is, given that no A'-movement occurs with bare DemNeg, it should be fine to answer (16A) with *dheamhan a mbuaileann*, (literally, ‘demon aN hits’), with DemNeg+Responsive Ellipsis. I leave this issue for future research.

5. Conclusions

In this paper I have examined the syntax of Irish Responsive Ellipsis and fragment ellipsis, starting with a comparison between the echoic verbal strategy used in languages like Irish, and the answer particle strategy described by Holmberg (2016). After comparing the two options in terms of computational economy, I have described the syntax of Irish fragment answers and the two kinds of A'-complementisers that are used in the language. After demonstrating that *dheamhan* is not a negative determiner and that it is independent of the presence of another constituent to its right in the non-elliptical case, I have described the syntax of DemNeg, proposing that the marker *dheamhan* occupies a left-

⁹ Interestingly, *mica*, just like *dheamhan*, is perfectly fine in fragments if it is followed by another XP: *Mica Gianni* is a well formed NFA.

peripheral NegP which is found above FocP. The Spec of the latter projection is thus empty and can be targeted by movement of a constituent, which derives the DemNeg+XP construction. Merchant's (2004) analysis for fragment ellipsis derives the functioning of this construction in answers to YNQs. Using polarity licensing as a diagnostic tool, I have demonstrated that *dheamhan* always has wide scope over the lower clause and not just over the adjacent XP. I have examined the interaction of Responsive Ellipsis and demonic NFAs with the principle of MaxElide, ruling out the cooccurrence of the two strategies. Finally, I have briefly described the use of bare DemNeg in NFAs, explaining the presence for the dummy pronoun *é* in addition to *dheamhan* in terms of the need for an item in SpecFocP to trigger fragment ellipsis, and of the necessity for negative adverbs to have an overt argument to quantify over.

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