

Coping With the Copula

"Fronting" for Emphasis

In our *Crúba* story, we recently ran across several instances of "fronting", in which emphasis is applied to some item in a sentence by bringing it to the front of the statement with an actual or implied copula form and finishing the sentence up with a relative clause. (Don't worry, the previous sentence will make more sense after we've worked on it a little bit.)

So, one of the sentences toward the end of Chapter 2 was:

Is ag labhairt leo i dtaobh a n-iompar sa rang a bhí Siobhán ...

Now, this sentence could have been written:

Bhí Siobhán ag labhairt leo i dtaobh a n-iompar sa rang.

The facts would remain the same. But by saying something like, "It is speaking to them about their behavior in class that Siobhán was doing", we make the activity stand out. And we do this because we can't use voice stress in Irish. Instead, Irish makes use of *grammatical constructions* to indicate contrast and emphasis.

You even hear some of the same things going on in Hiberno-English. "Isn't it lovely the day we're having?" "It's Joe Kelly who is digging that ditch." "It's a new shovel that he is using to do it."

Goal for Now: Pattern Recognition

For now, I'm more interested that you start noticing this construction and recognizing how it works when you see it than in having you construct them on the fly in conversation. But we'll do some construction to help us understand the concept.

(I know some of our students use Nancy Stenson's excellent grammar reference books. This is briefly covered in Unit 3, "Focus Structures", of the second book, *Intermediate Irish*.)

"Fronting" Elements for Emphasis

The typical plan is to put whatever is most important right behind the copula, and then to use a direct relative clause to complete the message.

So, let's make a simple statement (which may or may not be true):

Scríobh Stephen King "Cujo" le peann

Stephen King wrote "Cujo" with a pen.

When we "front" part of the sentence, you can almost feel a contrast, an unspoken "instead of" explanation, in the sentence:

Is é Stephen King a scríobh "Cujo".

*lit., It is **Stephen King** who wrote "Cujo" or*

Stephen King wrote "Cujo".

(That is, it wasn't Shakespeare)

Is é "Cujo" a scríobh Stephen King

It is "**Cujo**" that Stephen King wrote *or*

Stephen King wrote "**Cujo**."

(That is, he didn't write "Hamlet".)

Is le peann a scríobh Stephen King "Cujo". It is **with a pen** that Stephen King wrote "Cujo".

Stephen King wrote "Cujo" **with a pen**.

(That is, not a pencil or a typewriter.)

Half Copula, Half Clause

These sentences are kind of a hybrid, with a copula front end and a relative clause back end. Note that neither half works by itself:

Is é Stephen King a scríobh "Cujo."

By the way, the copula is not always expressed. So the sentence from the story, "Sophie a bhí ag caint.", is part of this pattern, even though there's no copula (i.e., *Ba í Sophie a bhí ...*).

You *do* see sentences where there is a more elaborate front end:

Is é Stephen King an t-údar a scríobh "Cujo." Stephen King is the author who wrote 'Cujo'.

That *may* be more emphatic than "Stephen King wrote "Cujo", but – gut feeling of an amateur here – it is often more of a simple explanation. In other words, it simply states a piece of information rather than making the kind of contrast (King vs. Shakespeare) I mentioned above.

So when we are making a point about a particular item in our utterance, we'll want to isolate that at the front of the statement. Naturally, we can do this with questions, past/conditional, indefinite subjects, and all that, don't be misled by the consistency of the examples above.

Ba é Shakespeare a scríobh "Hamlet." *Nach é Tony Bennett atá ag casadh?*

Ar nathair a mharaigh Cleopatra?

And the copula does not have to be in the past just because the event happened in the past. We often say things like:

Is bád nua a cheannaigh mé an tseachtain seo caite.

Is eisean a dhíol an bád sin dhom inné.

(If we do use *ba*, a following noun is usually lenited.)

Additional notes

When a definite noun follows the copula (Stephen King), it is preceded by the appropriate pronoun.

When the pronoun itself is the emphasized element -- **I** did it, **She** bought that, etc. -- then we generally use contrast forms: *mise*, *tusa*, etc.

Like *le peann* above, we can "front" other structures, especially progressive verbs and time words.

Is amárach a bheas mé ag goil ag an dochtúir. (Tomorrow, not two days from now)

Is ag rith atá sé. (He's running, not bicycling or driving or ...)

Is ar an traen a tháinig siad. (on the train, not the plane)

Is ag ithe an dinnéir atá sí.

(She's eating dinner right now, that's why she can't answer the phone.)

There's another construction using *ea* that you will encounter. This applies when we're connecting a pronoun with an indefinite noun to say what something is, with emphasis:

Is madra í. (Simple statement that it's a dog.)

Madra is ea í. (It's a dog, not a cat.)

Is uachtarán é. (He's a president.)

Uachtarán is ea é. (He's a president, not a prime minister.)

To tell the truth, that *is ea* is pretty common in some places, especially Munster. So it may not be a very strong emphatic statement every time you hear it. But if you *do* want to emphasize that we're talking about a dog rather than a cat, this is the way you'll have to do.

Direct Relative Clause Review

I know we haven't done direct relative clauses with everyone yet, but the basics in these sentences are fairly straightforward.

For these kinds of sentences, simply drop *a* in front of the verb, followed by lenition. Use independent forms (*atá, a bhí, a chonaic*). Same for the past, keep the *d'* (*deoch a d'ól sé*).

If you are using a negative, then *nach + eclipsis* with a dependent form is the rule, except for the past: *nár + lenition + independent* for regular verbs (drop the *d'*). Use the *nach* version with irregulars.

Is í an cailín nár phóg mé.

Is í an cailín nach bpósann buachaillí.

Is é an fear nach ndearna an obair.

IN-CLASS WARM-UP

"Front" the underlined items, one by one, in the sentences below. (You can stick with *Is/present*.)

1. Bíonn an múinteoir ar scoil 'chuile lá.
2. Bhuaigh Lindsey Vonn bronn ór ag na cluichí Oilimpeacha.
3. Rinne George Clooney "Ides of March" i mbliana.
4. Tiofadh sneachta go Minnesota go gairid.
5. Phóg sí muc aréir.
6. Tá Suzy ag staidéar anois díreach.

HOMEWORK

Part A: Unpack Fronted Sentences

The following sentences are examples taken directly from our story. Rewrite them to remove the emphasis, as simple statements with no copula.

1. Is ag labhairt leo i dtaobh a n-iompar sa rang a bhí Siobhán ...
(Bhí Siobhán ag labhairt leo i dtaobh a n-iompar sa rang.)
2. I mBaile na Leacan atáimid
3. Veain atá á thiomáint agamsa (Hint: use *ag tiomáint* in the sentence)
4. Is é Dia a sheol chugainn sibh!
5. Dúshlán de shórt éagsúil a bhí ann.
6. Sé bliana déag an mheán aois a bhí acu.
7. Sophie a bhí ag caint.

Part B: Front for Emphasis

The following sentences are taken directly from the story. Use this construction to emphasize the bold-faced word in each statement.

1. Leag Siobhán **an mála sceallóg** síos.

2. Leag sí bas a láimhe **ar dhornán an luamháin**.
3. Bhí **an t-airgead** de dhíth uirthi.
4. Bhris **an ghloine** ina smidiríní ar fud an chairr.
5. Bhí pian **ina muinéal**.
6. Bhí sé i siopa sa chathair **inné**.
7. Bhain sí **seac na gcluasán** as an bpoillín.
8. Bhain a lón **as an gcuisneoir**.
9. Bhuail **an clog** go láidir

Part C: Show and Tell

If you see or hear an example of this use, *please* bring it in for show-and-tell. Also, make sure you notice when these happen in our story.

And if you get an opportunity, "front" a sentence in your weekly *scéal*.

Part D: Optional Extra Practice

If you have nothing else to do, use "fronting" to emphasize the **bold-faced** item.

1. **You** bought a new car!
2. I am going home **on the bus**.
3. She bought a house **yesterday**.
4. A **robin** is singing.
5. We'll have a **frost** tonight.
6. **Mary's dog** ate my sandwich.
7. Mary's dog ate **my sandwich**.
8. She's **sleeping!**
9. **The new nurse** accidentally sat on the patient.
10. The priest carries **his book** from house to house.