

Coping With the Copula: X

"Fronting" for Emphasis

Beyond the basic purpose of the copula, to identify and classify things, to link nouns, there is an important use to bring emphasis to specific elements of a sentence. The idea is to use the copula to bring the emphasized element to the front of the sentence, and then to put the rest in the back half of the sentence.

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."

Irish makes use of *grammatical constructions*, rather than voice stress, to indicate contrast and emphasis.

"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 "Cujos". (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" *or*
 Stephen King wrote "Cujo" **with a pen.** (That is, he didn't use 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."

You *do* see sentences where there is a complete 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?*

But 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.*

Additional notes

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

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

And if there's a question involved, we'll answer the ones where the copula is followed by a pronoun with appropriate pronouns in the answer ('s é, 's iad, etc.). If the copula question is not followed by a pronoun, we'll have an *ea* answer.

Like the *le peann* example at the beginning, we can use other structures, especially progressive verbs and time words.

Is amárach a bheidh 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.)

For those copula statements that start with an indefinite noun, there's another structure for emphasizing the noun, namely, putting the copula in the middle of the sentence with *ea*. So,

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

Just a reminder that a "direct relative clause" is one in which the part before the clausal particle *a* is either the subject or object of the phrase. So,

Is fear a dhíol é -> subject: it's a **man** that sold it. (not a woman)
Is bád a dhíol sé -> object: it's a **boat** that he sold. (not a lawnmower)

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 + eclipsis + 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.

WARM-UP

"Front" the underlined items, one by one, in the sentences below.

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. Tiocfaidh sneachta go Minnesota go gairid.
5. Phóg sí muc aréir.
6. Tá Suzy ag staidéar anois díreach.

HOMEWORK

First, if you see or hear an examples of this use, *please* bring it in for show-and-tell.

Next, put the sentences below into Irish. Use "fronting" to emphasize the **bold-faced** item.

1. It's an **elephant**.
2. **You** bought a new car?
3. **Stephen King** did not write "Little Women."
4. I am going home **on the bus**.
5. She bought a house **yesterday**.
6. A **robin** is singing.
7. We'll have a **frost** tonight.
8. **Mary's dog** ate my sandwich.
9. Mary's dog ate **my sandwich**.
10. She's **sleeping!**
11. **The new nurse** accidentally sat on the patient.
12. The priest carries **his book** from house to house.
13. **Americans** always talk loudly.
14. **Joe Dimaggio** hit the ball over the wall.