

# Back to Irish

The purpose of this ‘assignment’ is to present a fairly large set of observations to you concerning Irish, in the hope that they will be helpful in resolving some of the analytic and theoretical issues we are currently grappling with.

## A SPECIAL VERB CLASS

Irish has a class of verbs (with no conventional name) which exhibit commonalities with one another in both semantic and syntactic terms. A typical exemplar is given in (1):

- (1)     Nearthaigh         ar an stoirm.  
          strengthen[PAST] on the storm  
          ‘The storm increased in strength.’

A fairly complete list of verbs of this type is presented in the Appendix. Please study that list.

Some, but not all, of the verbs in this class have alternates which look more like routine intransitive verbs:

- (2)     a.   Mhéadaigh ar mo shaibhreas.  
          increased on my wealth  
          ‘My wealth increased.’  
       b.   Mhéadaigh mo shaibhreas.  
          increased my wealth  
          ‘My wealth increased.’

Does the set of ideas we have been developing in our class discussions help you understand:

- (i) why a class of verbs like this should be expected to exist,  
(ii) why the members of this verb-class might be expected to show the properties that they do?

In thinking this through, it may be helpful to see how this verb-class interacts with progressive aspect. You may remember from last quarter’s work that progressive structures are formed by using the verb to be as an auxiliary and by prefixing a nonfinite form of the verb with the particle *ag*:

- (3)     Tá         siad         ag     tógáil tithé i mBaile Átha Cliath.  
          be[PRES] they[NOM] PROG build houses in Dublin  
          ‘They are building houses in Dublin.’

Our mysterious verb-class forms progressive as shown below:

- (4)     a.   Tá         ag     dul dá     neart.  
          be[PRES] PROG go to-his strength  
          ‘His strength is waning.’  
       b.   Tá         ag     titim ar líon na         mac léinn.  
          be[PRES] PROG fall on number the[GEN] students[GEN]  
          ‘The number of students is falling.’

But a verb like (2b) will form a progressive as in (5b), so that we see synonymous doublets like (5a) and (5b):

- (5)     a.   Tá ag méadú         ar mo shaibhreas.  
          is PROG increase[-FIN] on my wealth  
          ‘My wealth is increasing.’

- b. Tá mo shaibreas ag méadú.  
 is my wealth PROG increase[-FIN]  
 'My wealth is increasing.'

(5a) corresponds to (2a), while (5b) corresponds to (2b).

### THE PERFECTIVE PASSIVE

To express recent perfective aspect, Irish uses the kind of structure seen in (6):

- (6) a. Beidh an tráchtas críochnaithe agam amárach.  
 be[FUT] the thesis finished at-me tomorrow  
 'I'll have finished the thesis/have the thesis finished tomorrow.'
- b. Tá teach ceannaithe agam.  
 be[PRES] house bought by-me  
 'I have bought a house.'
- c. nuair a bhí an méid sin déanta  
 when c be[PAST] the amount DEMON done  
 'when that much was done.'

The general pattern (speaking pre-theoretically) for the formation of such examples can be roughly schematized as follows:

- (i) The 'notional' subject appears as the object of the preposition *ag*
- (ii) The 'notional' object appears as the surface subject
- (iii) The aspect of the clause formed is recent perfective
- (iv) The 'agentive' *ag*-phrase is systematically optional.

This should seem familiar.

Subparts of verb-object idioms may appear as surface subjects in this construction:

- (7) a. Rinne sé a chóta bán  
 made he his coat white  
 'He made his fortune.'
- b. Tá do chóta bán déanta agat.  
 is your coat white made by-you  
 'You have made your fortune.' (FBF 222)

In northern dialects, this is the only pattern possible. However, when we exam southern dialects (those of Munster), we see a broader range of possibilities.

With two argument verbs whose second argument is a PP, we see the pattern in (8):

- (8) a. go mbeadh labhartha air féin  
 c would-be spoken on[MS<sub>3</sub>] self  
 'that he himself would have been spoken about' (SAIL 274)
- b. Bhíodh scríofa chuige roimh ré  
 used-to-be written to-him in-advance  
 'He used to have been written to in advance.' (NChan 76)
- c. go bhfuil díolta go ró-dhaor againn astu  
 c is paid ADV too-dearly by-us out-of-them  
 'that we have paid too dearly for them' (G 224)

- d. Bhí cuíithe agam rôl air  
was thought by-me before-you on-it  
'I had thought of it before you' (SAIL 276)
- e. bhí diúltaithe don muintearas agat  
was refused to-the family-feeling by-you  
'You had repudiated family-feeling.' (NhAOTh 69)

'Object Deletion Verbs' (verbs whose internal argument may be implicit) form perfective passives as in (9):

- (9) a. Agus sula raibh ite acu agus ólta acu  
And before was eaten by-them and drunk by-them  
'And before they had eaten and drunk' (OTh 100)
- b. Nuair a bhí críochnaithe againn  
When c was finished by-us  
'When we had finished' (P 68)
- c. Bhí géillte roimh ré aige  
was surrendered before time by-him  
'He had surrendered in advance'

And the 'special class of verbs' which figured in our earlier discussion form perfective passives as shown in (10) and (11):

- (10) a. go bhfuil teipithe ar an rinceoir mór  
c is failed on the dancer great  
'that the great dancer has failed' (BB 133)
- b. Bhí briste ar a fhoighid  
was broken on his patience  
'His patience had given out.' (FFF 337)
- c. go bhfuil éirighthe leis sa n-obair  
c is rose with-him in-the work  
'that he has done well in the business' (SmBN 1:40)
- d. Tá tagaithe fén bhféar  
is come under-the grass  
'The grass has become warm.' (CBG 264)
- e. Tá méadaithe ar líon na mac léinn  
is increased on number the[GEN] students[GEN]  
'The number of students has increased.'
- (11) a. Bhí imithe dá neart  
was gone of-his strength  
'His strength had waned.'
- b. Nuair a bhí maolaithe ar an bpian  
when c was blunted on the pain  
'When the pain had eased'
- c. Nuair a bhí moillithe ar a rith  
when c was slowed on his run  
'When his pace had slowed'
- d. Nuair a bhí dultha den fhíon  
when c was gone of-the wine  
'When the wine had given out'

And finally, we have examples like those in (12):

- (12) a. níos faide ná mar bhí dulta aige  
more farther than as was gone by-him  
'farther than he had gone' (ÓTh 14)
- b. tá tagaithe ós bhúr gcómhair agam  
is come before-you by-me  
'I have come before you' (L 9)
- c. go raibh teite lena n-anam acu  
c was fled with-their soul by-them  
'that they had fled for their lives' (SCh 163)
- d. nuair a bhí bogaithe ag an lá  
when c was softened by the day  
'when the day had become milder' (cp SAIL 228)
- (13) a. nuair a bhí tráite síos uaidh  
when c was ebbed down from-it  
'when the tide had ebbed down from it' (LA 36)
- b. go bhfuil trialtha chó maith agat  
c is proved so good by-you  
'that you have proved (to be) so good' (SAIL 270)
- c. conus atá iompuighthe amach aige  
how is turned out by-him  
'how he has turned out' (L 120)
- d. tá cúlaithe ag anam náisiúnta na ndaoine  
is receded by soul national the people  
'the national spirit of the people has receded' (DD 33)
- (14) a. Cheapas arís go raibh seasta agam ar bhobghaiste  
I-thought again c was stood by-me on booby-trap  
'I thought I had stood on a booby-trap again.'
- b. nuair a bheadh préamhaithe i gceart aiges na crainn  
when c be[COND] rooted in right by the trees  
'when the trees would have rooted properly' (IC 61)
- c. Ach ní raibh tosúighthe i gceart fós ag an ngeimhreadh  
but NEG was begun in right yet by the winter  
'But the winter hadn't started properly yet.'

## APPENDIX

- (15) Laghdaigh ar a neart  
decreased on his strength  
'His strength decreased.'
- (16) Mhéadaigh ar a neart  
increased on his strength  
'His strength increased.'
- (17) Bhreisigh ar an ghluaiseacht  
increased on the movement  
'The movement increased.'
- (18) Chuir ar an stoirm  
put on the storm  
'The storm increased (in fury).'
- (19) Lagaigh air  
weakened on-him  
'He weakened.'
- (20) Neartaigh ar a sciúch  
strengthened on his voice  
'His voice strengthened.'
- (21) Threisigh ar m' iarrachtaí  
strengthened on my attempts  
'My attempts strengthened.'
- (22) Ghéaraigh ar a choiscéim  
sharpened on his pace  
'His pace quickened.'
- (23) Mhaolaigh ar a siúl  
blunted on their pace  
'Their pace eased/slowed.'
- (24) Bhrostaigh ar a siúl  
hurried on their pace  
'Their pace quickened.'
- (25) Leathnaíonn ar úsáid na Gaeilge  
widens on use the Irish  
'The use of Irish spreads.'
- (26) Mhoilligh ar a rith  
slowed on his run  
'His pace slowed.'
- (27) D'athiompaigh air  
turned-back on-him  
'He had a relapse.'
- (28) Thit ar líon na mac léinn.  
fell on number the students  
'The number of students fell.'
- (29) Chlaochlaigh ar a neart  
deteriorated on his strength  
'His strength waned.'
- (30) Bhris ar a fhoighid  
broke on his patience  
'His patience gave out.'
- (31) Chaill ar a mhisneach  
lost on his courage  
'His courage failed.'
- (32) Má théann ar an airgead  
if goes on the money  
'If the money gives out.'
- (33) Thráfaidh ar an spiorad sin  
would-ebb on the spirit DEMON  
'That spirit would wane.'
- (34) Feabhsaíonn air  
improves on-it  
'It improves.'
- (35) Chruaigh orthu  
hardened on-them  
'They hardened.'
- (36) Thromaigh ar a n-anacair  
became-heavy on their distress  
'Their distress became harder to bear.'
- (37) D'éirigh air  
rose on-him  
'He became agitated.'
- (38) Scoilfidh ort  
will-burst on-you  
'You'll burst.'
- (39) Chiúnaigh ar ghibris na bpáistí  
quietened on chatter the children  
'The children's chatter died down.'
- (40) Theip orthu  
failed on-them  
'They failed'
- (41) Chlis orthu  
failed on-them  
'They failed.'
- (42) Sháraigh orthu  
overcame on-them  
'They failed.'
- (43) D'fheall orm  
betrayed on-me  
'I failed.'

- (44) Chinn orthu  
surpass on-them  
'They failed.'
- (45) Má bheireann orm  
if catches on-me  
'If I'm in a fix.'
- (46) Chuaigh dá radharc  
went of-his sight  
'His sight faded.'
- (47) D'imigh dá neart  
left of-his strength  
'His strength gave out.'
- (48) Leanann dá cumhacht  
follows of-her power  
'Her power persists.'
- (49) Ní tháinig de  
NEG came of-it  
'Nothing came of it.'
- (50) Tagann fén urlár  
comes under-the floor  
'The floor is drawing damp.'
- (51) Dhubhaigh aige  
became-black at-him  
'He became depressed.'
- (52) Ghormaigh aige  
became-blue at-him  
'He became depressed.'
- (53) Chuaigh agam  
went at-me  
'I succeeded.'
- (54) D'éirigh go maith leis  
rose well with-him  
'He did well.'
- (55) Rith leis  
ran with-him  
'He did well.'
- (56) Shroich leis  
reached with-him  
'He succeeded.'
- (57) Tiocfaidh as na brístí  
will-come out-of the trousers  
'The trousers will stretch.'
- (58) D'éirigh eatarthu  
rose between-them  
'They fell out (quarreled).'
- (59) Thoisigh eatarthu  
began between-them  
'They fell out (quarreled).'
- (60) Théigh fá dtaobh don ghirseach  
warmed about-the girl  
'The girl became hot and bothered.'
- (61) Tháinig insa ghasúr  
came in-the boy  
'The boy grew up.'
- (62) Bhreáthaigh ar an aimsir.  
became-fine on the weather  
'The weather got better.'
- (63) Dheallraigh air go raibh sé buartha.  
looked on-him C was he upset  
'He seemed to be upset.'
- (64) Thriomaigh ar na foinsí.  
dried on the sources  
'The sources dried (up).'
- (65) Ba ag éadromú uirthi a bhí.  
PAST PROG lightening on-her C was  
'It was becoming lighter (losing weight) she was.'
- (66) D'fhuaigh ar ghrá Airt di.  
became-cold on love Arthur[GEN] for-her  
'Arthur's love for her went cold.'
- (67) Chríonnaigh ar na mná.  
became-old on the women  
'The women aged.'
- (68) go gcúngóidh orthu  
C become-narrow[FUT] on-them  
'that they will become narrow'
- (69) ar eagla go séidfeadh air  
on fear C blow[COND] on-it  
'for fear that a storm would blow up'
- (70) Gealann ar Pheadar.  
brightens on Peter  
'Peter's mood brightens.'