

A Chairde (Friends),

Welcome to the first of this series of lessons run by Cumann Carad na Gaeilge dealing with the book "Progress in Irish" by Máiréad Ní Ghráda. I hope that most of you have received your copy of the book by now but for those who are still awaiting their copy an extract is available in the Files section of this group.

In this email I will attempt to explain some of the finer points of the language in order to give you a basis for further studies. To those of you who have a good grasp of English grammar I apologise in advance. My apologies also to those of you who may have covered the basics in our Starting To Learn group, as much of what I intend to cover in this email may already be familiar to you. If that is the case I beg your indulgence. You may find something in this week's lesson that helps to explain a point by way of some of the examples.

Throughout this level of Máiréad's book I will try to keep the grammar content of these emails relevant to the particular lesson.

Assignments/Homework: With most of the lessons in the book there is a series of exercises. In this week's lesson, for example, there are ten questions in the "Freagair" section and twelve statements in the "Cuir Gaeilge air seo". For your assignment this week you should answer the questions in the "Freagair" section in full even though that will mean, in most cases, simply copying the text from the "Léigh" section on the same page. By writing them out yourself (in Irish) you will gain the experience of spelling and structure. Similarly, you should then also translate the twelve English sentences which will involve a little more care and attention to detail.

Having completed the assignment you should then forward the "Cuir Gaeilge air seo" section to me for evaluation. You can do that by simply completing the assignment in the body of an email and sending it to my personal email address, viz. larry.ackerman@... However, you should not feel that this is a "pass" or "fail" situation. It is simply to ensure that you have understood the lesson. It also serves as feedback and enables me to identify particular areas which may need to be addressed in more detail.

It will help me a great deal if you use the word "assignment" in the Subject field of your homework emails. This is, of course, not essential but it will ensure that your assignments do not get filtered out as "junk mail".

Finally, if you have any questions about the current (or any previous) lesson, just ask. As we work through the book, and at our own pace, there will invariably be something that doesn't quite settle in our minds at first or that we have temporarily forgotten from earlier lessons. A question to the group, no matter how basic, can achieve remarkable results!

Le meas (With respect),

Larry.

Grammar:

In English we construct a simple sentence using a VERB (the *action* word), frequently preceded by a SUBJECT (the *person* or *thing* performing the action), giving us the following formula:

[subject] + [verb] + [remainder of the sentence]

[Brian] + [is] + [walking]

[Seán] + [is] + [running]

[Nóra] + [is] + [eating]

In the above examples, "is" is the VERB. "Brian", "Seán" and "Nóra" are the SUBJECTS of the sentence. We will deal with the "remainder of the sentence" further down in this email.

In a simple Irish sentence, the VERB comes at the BEGINNING of the sentence and is followed by the SUBJECT.

Lesson 1 introduces us to the Irish verb "tá", equivalent to the English verb "is". This is actually the PRESENT tense of the verb "bí. " We use the present tense to make a positive statement about something that is happening *now*.

The important feature of this week's lesson is that the VERB comes BEFORE the SUBJECT.

So now we have the construction: [verb] + [subject] + [remainder of the sentence]

[Tá] + [Brian] + [ag siúl]

[Tá] + [Seán] + [ag rith]

[Tá] + [Nóra] + [ag ithe]

+ + + + +

ag siúl (walking): The word "siúl" is a VERBAL NOUN and, when used like it is in this week's lesson, is equivalent to the English *present participle*. As we work through the course we will encounter other uses of the VERBAL NOUN but, when used in the manner demonstrated in this week's lesson, it is preceded by the PREPOSITION "ag" (which basically translates as "at") and it's this preposition which gives us the '-ing' part of the word:

walk - verb

walking - verbal noun

run - verb

running - verbal noun

eat - verb

eating - verbal noun

We can now begin to see what the "remainder of the sentence" looks like.

[verb] + [subject] + [ag] + [verbal noun]

[Tá] + [Brian] + [ag] + [siúl] - Brian is walking.

We can also extend the remainder of this type of sentence by using an ADVERB:

[verb] + [subject] + [ag] + [verbal noun] + [adverb]

[Tá] + [an bhean] + [ag] + [dul] + [amach] - The woman is going out.

+ + + + +

The noun: In Irish, all nouns are either masculine or feminine. In general terms, those nouns denoting a male are MASCULINE and those for females are FEMININE. However, there are some exceptions. This week's lesson has one of those exceptions, viz "cailín". Even though a "girl" is obviously female, it is a masculine noun!

fear - man (masculine singular noun)

páiste - child (masculine singular noun)

cailín - girl (masculine singular noun)

buachaill - boy (masculine singular noun)

múinteoir - teacher (masculine singular noun)

Brian - masculine proper noun

Seán - masculine proper noun

Nóra - feminine proper noun

Eamann - masculine proper noun

Niall - masculine proper noun

bean - woman (feminine singular noun). See the article at the end of this email "An introduction to *lenition*"

All the nouns in this week's lesson are SINGULAR. Irish, like English, has a method of changing nouns into PLURAL (man > men, girl > girls etc) but we will deal with that later in the course. Irish nouns also have a CASE system but, for now, I will ask you to accept that the nouns in this week's lesson are shown in what I prefer to call the COMMON case or form. This common case is equivalent to the *nominative* and *accusative* found in English grammar.

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The *article* ("a", "an" and "the"): In English we have a *definite* article ("the") and an *indefinite* article ("a" or "an").

The *definite* article in Irish is "an", which is used with singular nouns in most cases.

The good news is that there is no *indefinite* article in Irish, so it is one less thing to get confused about. Máiréad Ní Ghráda waits until lesson 5 to impart this good news but I think it is helpful to know that fact now.

I have included a summary table of the definite article in the Files section of this group. See "The Article.pdf".

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The adverb: The ones introduced in this lesson are of one particular type: *motion*

amach - out
isteach - in
abhaile - home

These adverbs describe actual movement, rather than location, and it may help you to think of them as "outward (bound)", "inward (bound)" and "homeward (bound)."

For example, in the "Léigh" section on page 3, we see sentence #7:

Tá an bhean ag dul amach (The woman is going out). She is currently in the process of 'going' so she's still in motion.

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An introduction to questions in Irish.

cé? - who?: This is an *interrogative pronoun* and is placed in front of a verb in order to ask a question. In this week's lesson we're asking "who" is doing something.

The examples on page 3 of the book give us the following construction:

[int. pr] + [verb] + [ag] + [verbal noun] + [adverb]
cé + atá + ag + dul + amach? - Who is going out?

cé + a: The examples given on page 3 of the book are a little confusing. A verb following "Cé?" (Who?) should be preceded by the *verbal particle* "a". The "a" is usually written separately but in the case of the verb "tá" it combines to form "atá". In Standard Irish (the form used in the book) this should be "Cé atá ag siúl?". One possible explanation for the omission in the book is that this "a" is not heard following "cé". It *sounds like* "cé tá" but should always be *written* as "cé atá."

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An introduction to *lenition*: Some Irish words change their spelling and pronunciation in a sentence. One of these changes is called LENITION. Originally, this change was represented by placing a small dot over the consonant but, with the advent of modern typefaces, it is now shown in written Irish by placing the letter "h" after certain consonants.

This lenition only occurs with the consonants B, C, D, F, G, M, P, S and T as follows:

b > bh
c > ch
d > dh
f > fh
g > gh
m > mh
p > ph
s > sh
t > th

The remaining consonants are NOT subject to lenition.

Don't worry too much at this stage! The rules governing lenition are quite complex but, for this week's lesson, I will endeavour to explain one of them. Let me take the example of the feminine singular noun for "woman": [bean - (a) woman.]

When a FEMININE singular noun in the *common form* (see above item on "The noun") is preceded by the *definite article* (an), the initial consonant of the noun is subject to lenition. So we see, for example:

bean - woman, or "a" woman,
an bhean - THE woman.

One exception to this rule is that it does NOT apply if the noun begins with D, S or T, even though those consonants can be lenited. However, as the nouns in this week's lesson don't begin with D, S or T we can safely put this exception to one side for the time being.

A MASCULINE singular noun in the common form, however, is NOT subject to lenition following the definite article (an). So we see, for example:

fear - (a) man
an fear - THE man.

To summarise, if we want to say " *the* woman is going out," we say "Tá an bhean ag dul amach" and if we want to say " *a* woman" is going out," we say "Tá bean ag dul amach". For a little more information on the rules concerning the article (an) see the file "The Article.pdf" in the Files section of this group.