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SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES IN IRISH-LANGUAGE
PROVERBS

Abstract: In recent years, linguistic studies into the concept of 'proverbiality' have provided paremiologists with a more comprehensive understanding of the form and function of proverbial markers in a wide range of languages. Unfortunately, the Irish language has, until now, not featured in any of these linguistic analyses. This paper seeks to re-address this imbalance and to bring the unique structure and style of Irish-language proverbs to the attention of the international community of paremiologists for the first time. This research study applies the general methodology adopted by such scholars as Mahgoub (1948), Silverman-Weinreich (1978) and Arora (1984), to a corpus sample of Irish proverbs and provides both a qualitative and quantitative account of the most salient syntactic structures contained in Irish-language proverbs. Proverbial patterns as well as the collocation of proverbial markers are also discussed.

Keywords: Irish Language; Syntax; Style; Emphatic Word Order; Clefting; Parallelism; Parataxis.

1. Introduction

One of the key areas of international paremiological scholarship in modern times has been the analysis of proverbial markers and the concept of 'proverbiality' (Arora, 1984). Many scholars have directed their attention to questions of 'proverbial style' in order to identify which internal and external markers distinguish the proverb from its surrounding discourse, and to analyse how these devices operate in different world languages. Of these markers, it is universally agreed that proverbial 'style' incorporates, to varying degrees, poetic devices, such as parallelism, ellipsis, alliteration and rhyme, and also semantic devices such as metaphor, personification, paradox, and hyperbole (Mieder, 2004:7). The major works of the paremiological canon in the English language, including Taylor (1931), Whiting (1932), and Mieder (2004), have

provided a synoptic overview of these devices, but language-specific studies have also contributed to our overall understanding of proverbial style through detailed examinations of structure and style in various languages throughout the world, including Ancient Greek, Ancient Egyptian, (Cairene) Arabic, English, American English, Esperanto, French, Hebrew, Hungarian, Igbo, Italian, Latin, Russian, Spanish, Tamil, Welsh, Yoruba, and numerous other African languages.1 Inevitably such studies of style, particularly those dealing with poetic features, have also featured in structuralist treatments of the illusive issue of proverb definition.2 In spite of such pioneering scholarship, the fact remains that, unfortunately, there has been no comprehensive examination of the style and structure of Irish-language proverbs, and while Robinson (1945) and De Bric (1976) have provided cursory examinations of Irish proverbs, and touched upon general questions of structure and proverbial formulas, there has been no thorough treatment of the material. This paper, being the first section of a more comprehensive, detailed analysis of proverbial style and structure in the Irish language, seeks to begin to readdress this imbalance by providing a linguistic description and analysis of the most salient aspects of syntax in Irish-language proverbs.

2. Methodology

The aim of this research was to investigate the frequency and form of syntactical proverbial markers in Irish-language proverbs. The general approach to the study took inspiration from the corpus-based methodology implemented by Mahgoub (1948), Silverman-Weinreich (1981) and Arora (1984), but was developed and adapted to suit the specific research questions relating to Irish proverbs. The main methodological questions and the responses to them are described below.

2.1 Population or Sampling Frame

From a methodological perspective the first question we had to answer is what data set was required for a statistical examination of the proverbs. There were two distinct options in this regard: firstly, there was the option of examining the 'total population' (Freund, Williams and Perles, 1993:336) which, in our example, would consist of the entire corpus of proverbial material in

modern Irish; or, secondly, the option of sampling, in which an overview of the syntactic structures of the total population might be gained by analysing a representative sample. From a research perspective, it is, of course, not always practical to analyse the entire population (Spiegel and Stephens, 1999:1) and the absence of any published comprehensive national collection of Irish-language proverbs highlighted this fact. It was decided, therefore, for the purposes of expediency and manageability of data, that sampling methods would be used to provide data from which we could infer conclusions relating to Irish proverbs in general.

2.2 Specification of Sampling Frame

The first step in the process was to create a sampling frame containing the various units of the target population that we intended to sample. The lack of a published comprehensive proverbial dictionary or corpus meant that a sampling frame had to be created from those published collections of Irish proverbs which were viewed to be the most authentic, accurate and representative of the Irish proverbial canon. As it stands, a substantial body of proverbs is to be found in three dialectal publications of the early to middle twentieth century, which broadly cover the main dialects of Modern Irish over the period 1856-1952. (It should be noted that, besides proverbs, all of these publications contain a variety of other fixed expressions: proverbial phrases, proverbial comparisons, *blason populaire*, blessings, curses and weather beliefs). The first of these is *Seanfhocla Uladh,* literally *The Proverbs of Ulster,* (Ó Muirgheasa 1907; 2nd Edition, 1936; 3rd Edition, Ed. Ó hUrmoltaigh, 1976) which, when first published in 1907, was the largest printed collection of proverbial material in Irish and included over 1600 entries.[3] The second collection, *Seanfhocail na Muimhneach,* literally *The Proverbs of the Munstermen,* (Ó Siochfhradha 1926; 2nd Edition, *Seanfhocail na Mumhan*, (ed.). Ua Maoileoin, 1984) was published in 1926 and contained over 2000 entries; and, finally, the most comprehensive of all, the two-volume *Sean-fhocla Chonnacht,* literally *The Proverbs of Connacht* (Ó Máille 1948 and 1952; 2nd Edition, *Seanfhocla Chonnacht*, (ed.). Donla Uí Bhraonáin, 2010), which was originally published in 1948 and 1952 respectively, and contained over 5000 entries.

Archer Taylor (1931) identified the myriad difficulties in the collection and study of proverbs and, as is common in many other languages, these older Irish proverb collections did not have the benefit of modern approaches to questions of definition, classification or arrangement. This is particularly the case with the terminological and classificatory inconsistencies that are found in all three, for what we now consider 'proverbs' are referred to by a variety of terms without any differentiation: *seanfhocail* 'old sayings, proverbs', *seanráite* 'old sayings, aphorisms', *cainteanna* 'expressions', and *natháin* 'pithy proverbial sayings, adages, aphorisms.'[4] In addition, it is also unfortunate that, although most of the material was gleaned from oral tradition, the editors omitted systematic ancillary details of sources; illustrations of contextual use or semantic explanation, and information regarding currency. These are all common complaints of the modern paremiologist retrospectively examining the work of others from a different age,[5] but these three dialectal compilations of proverbial material represent the closest thing in print to a published authoritative, comprehensive, representative corpus of Irish proverbs in the modern age, and as a result, were chosen as the sampling frame from which a data sample could be extracted.

2.3 Sample Size

Sykes and Hoinville (1985) have claimed that the sample size depends more on the researchers' judgement and goals than it does on any mathematical calculation, but the sample size must have some rationale, and a comparative analysis with other work in the field is useful as a yardstick in such matters. Unfortunately, similar work in the field does not provide any clear indication of rationale. In spite of the numerous scholarly studies in proverb stylistics that we have mentioned, only a handful of scholars – Mahgoub (1968), Levin (1968), Silverman-Weinreich (1981) and Tóthné Litovkina (1990) – provide any indication of sample size, Mahgoub choosing 900, which were viewed to be in currency in modern day Egypt, Levin choosing a representative sample of 1400 from a Russian collection, Silverman-Weinreich selecting 300 from published collections of Yiddish proverbs, and Tóthné Litovkina selecting 317 Hungarian proverbs with which to compare Russian equivalents. Taking into account the total number in

the sampling frame for Irish it was decided that, in order to achieve a comparable standard and range of results, one thousand randomly-chosen items would be sufficient data for an analysis of Irish material.

2.4 The Sampling Method / Process

The sampling process involves the selection of a sample of proverbial material from the sampling frame. There are various methods of sampling but 'simple random sampling' was viewed to be the most suitable for this research, as each proverbial expression has an equal non-zero probability of being selected for the sample (Francis, 2004:6), and, in addition, the level of biases is least in simple random sampling compared with other methods of random sampling (Owen and Jones, 1994:304). The difference in the size of the collections had also to be considered to prevent any bias or unfair representation of one dialect over another. In our case, each proverb from the dialect in the sampling frame was allocated a number and then an electronic true random number generator[6] was used to select proverbial entries until the sample was complete. Exactly one third of the total sample (333 expressions) was chosen from each dialect of Irish: Connacht, Munster and Ulster, so that there would be a representative, equal distribution which would balance potential biases in the dialectal sample that may have affected the final results (an additional randomly chosen proverb was added to simplify the mathematical equation, i.e. n = 1000). The relatively small size of the frame meant that sampling with replacement (from an infinite population) was used to so that each item would have the same probability of selection, and thus, the covariance between the two items would be zero. Quantitative statistics were used to calculate the frequency of various syntactic markers in the randomly selected corpus and these results were entered into tabular form and analysed (See Appendices).

3. Examination of syntax and syntactical proverbial markers

3.1 Sentential and Phrasal Structures

Amongst the numerous attempts at defining a proverb, the characteristic of brevity and the claim that the proverb is a sentence are amongst the most frequently attributed to the form.

> 'An incommunicable quality tells us this <u>sentence</u> is proverbial and that one is not.' (Taylor, 1931:3)

'That proverbs are <u>short</u> and traditional is a generally accepted feature of definition.' (Seitel, 1969:144)

'A proverb is a <u>short</u>, generally known <u>sentence</u> of the folk…' (Mieder, 1985:119)

'Proverbs are <u>brief</u> (<u>sentence</u>-length) entextualized utterances… (Winick, 2003:595)

There are difficulties with these characteristics, however. Firstly, the adjective 'short' is quite subjective, and it is difficult to quantify what qualifies as a 'short' proverb, or when a 'short' proverb becomes a 'long' proverb.[7] Secondly, the term 'sentence' relates to grammatical language units that comprise a minimum sense of unity and completeness (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990:12), but this is not an entirely accurate description of proverbs, as some proverbs take the form of an ungrammatical phrasal unit, in which semantic relations must be inferred. In this section of the paper I wish therefore to investigate the 'shortness' of Irish proverbs by examining the mean number of words, and to also shed light on the types of sentential and phrasal constructions that are found in the corpus.[8]

The simple sentence, which contains one single independent clause, is the most commonly occurring type of sentence in our corpus, with over one half of the proverbs based on this structure (57%). It is the proverb structure *par excellence* in Irish, and, as Tóthné Litovkina (1990:244) has shown, the same is true of both Hungarian and Russian proverbs. The mean number of words in a simple sentence proverb is 6.5, and based on Dundes' (1975) topic-comment thesis, they are generally declarative and non-oppositional:

1. *Glacann drochbhean comhairle gach fir ach a fir féin.*
   (RA:§343)
   A bad wife takes advice from every man but her own husband.

2. *Bhuailfeadh an tubaiste le duine i lár an bhóthair.*
   (SC:§3267)
   A person could meet with misfortune in the middle of the road.

Many examples also follow Taylor's assessment that they developed from simple maxims (1931:5) and '… consist merely of a bald assertion which is recognized as proverbial only because we have heard it often and because it can be applied to many different situations.' These take the form of literal statements that do not usually exhibit poetic devices, except in the case of certain architectural comparative formulae (See '3.3.3 Emphasis in classificatory copulative sentences'), and in terms of subject matter, a large number have emanated from observances of daily life in a rural, agricultural community:

3. *Chan é lá na gaoithe lá na scolb*. (SU:§536)
    The day of the wind is not the day of the scollops.

4. *Is deacair a huan a bhaint den tseanchaora*. (SM:§2176)
    It is difficult to take an old sheep's lamb.

There are other proverbs that follow the same syntactic patterns that are found in gnomic wisdom literature of the Old Irish period (500-900AD). Three distinct structural formulas were used for these three-word maxims, according to Ireland (1999: 10-11): (i) verb + nominative + accusative, in other words, the normal sentence pattern in Irish; (ii) noun + genitive + nominative; (iii) '*ferr*' [= better] + nominative + dative. It is interesting that these formulas are still found in Modern Irish proverbs. It should also be noted that these maxims had recurring alliterative patterns and that 'more than seventy-five per cent of all three-word maxims alliterate on the same consonant, or on the initial vowel, between the second and third words' (Ireland, 1999:11). Examples in Modern Irish not only replicate these syntactic patterns, but also show the same attachment to alliteration as described by Carney, with some even showing the use of *epizeuxis* (No. 6). Of particular note is the comparative structure, although not always using the comparative adjective '*fearr*' (better), which is found in nearly one in five of the simple sentences (17%). It is difficult to say, however, if these are literary maxims that were included in the collections, or if they are modern formulations of an ancient structure:

Verb + nominative + accusative
5. *Gnóthaíonn taithí tarcaisne*. (SM:§1633)
    Experience acquires scorn.

6. *Aithníonn ciaróg ciaróg eile*. (SU:§266)
    A beetle recognizes another beetle.

    Noun + genitive + nominative
7. *Íde gach oilc an t-ól*. (SU:§681)
    The source of every evil (is) drink.

    '*Ferr*' [= better] + nominative + dative.
8. *Is fearr béasa ná breáthacht*. (SM:§254)
    Better manners than beauty.

   The simple sentence is also the favoured structure of meta-phorical proverbs as alluded to by Ezejideaku and Okeke (2008, 80-81) and there are numerous examples of the direct linguistic metaphor in which there is both reference to a topic domain by a vehicle term, and also a clear incongruity between these domains (Cameron, 1999:118):

9. *Sé gearrán na hoibre an bia*. (SC:§492)
    Food is the workhorse.

10. Is maith an scoil é an saol. (SC:§3618)
    Life is a good school.

   Complex sentences, containing one main clause and at least one sub-clause, are found in over one quarter of the corpus (27%). These sentences are by their very nature more syntactically dense than the simple sentences discussed above and tend to be 'longer', with a mean sentence string of 10.4 words. A particular stylistic feature of these proverbs is the inversion of subclauses to sentence-initial position for the purposes of emphasis, but this will be discussed in more detail in Section 3.3.2. In addition, a comparison of single subclauses versus multiple subclauses in complex sentences shows that the single subclause is the commoner structure:

11. *Ní breac é go mbíonn sé ar an bport*. (SM:§1683)
    It is not a trout until it is on the riverbank.

12. *Ní bhíonn íseal ná uasal ná bíonn thíos seal is thuas seal*. (SM:§1376)
    There is no lowly or noble person that is not up for a time and down for a time.

13. *Síleann an óige mar a bhíonn sí gan chéill go ndéantar a pósadh má pógtar a béal.*
(SC:§3483)
Youth without sense thinks that a marriage is made if a mouth is kissed.

The combined occurrence of other sentence types is only 9%. The compound sentence, in which a coordinator (*and, but, or*) joins two independent clauses, is found in less than one in ten proverbs (8%). It is significant that, although it has more clauses than the simple sentence, it is on average shorter and contains on averages 5.8 words. In terms of word length, it is also the shortest of all the other types of sentential and phrasal structures. Numerous examples are based on a formulaic structure featuring an imperative in the initial clause and a statement of consequence in the subsequent one (cause and effect) as can be seen below:

14. *Buail sa tóin í agus titfidh sí.* (SM:§263)
Hit her at the bottom and she will fall.

15. *Coinnigh an chnámh agus leanfaidh an madra thú.*
(SM:§2099)
Keep the bone and the dog will follow you.

The compound-complex structure is rarely found in the proverbs, possibly to the fact that the syntax is more complicated due to the multiplicity of clauses and subclauses (1%). Evidence shows that these sentences are generally longer on average 10.3 words per proverb, almost double the number found in simple and compound proverbs. The paucity of instances of this type of proverbs means that we can easily identify formulas, and there are two main types (i) sentences with imperative command in initial position in both main clauses, and (ii) inversion of the adverbial or conditional subclause(s) to sentence initial position and followed by the main clauses:

16. *Déan mar a déarfas an sagart ach ná déan mar a dhéanfas sé.* (SC:§2040)
Do as the priest says but do not do as he does.

17. *An áit a mbíonn mná bíonn caint agus an áit a mbíonn géanna bíonn callán.* (RA:§333)

> Where there are women there is talking and where
> there are geese there is cackling.

Proverbs containing phrases are found in 7% in total, and, of all the structures, they are generally the longest containing on average 13.4 words. Although this may seem incongruous, in that there is no explicit grammatical connection between these phrases, it should be remembered that other factors facilitate an extended structure, particularly syntactical repetition, (often together with syntactical and lexical parallelism), parataxis, and ellipsis of redundant verbal constructs. We will examine these issues in greater detail in later sections:

18. *Seanbhróg smeartha bróg nua.* (SM:§1034)
    A polished old-shoe, a new shoe.

19. *Bean ar meisce, bean in aisce.* (SC:2859)
    A drunk woman, a free (=gratis) woman.

3.2 Parallelism

Structural or syntactic parallelism[9], frequently occurring with semantic parallelism, is a rhetorical device for the purpose of emphasis or foregrounding, which involves structural symmetricity between sections of a text, in the case of this study – the proverb. Items such as nouns, phrases, clauses, and sentences, are juxtaposed contiguously through syndetic coordination (the conjunctions 'and', 'or', 'but') or asyndetic coordination (conjunctions absent) in order to suggest analogies and comparisons between opposing constituents.[10]

Linguistic studies on the form of proverbs, by scholars such as Taylor (1931:143)[11], Mahgoub (1968:37), Silverman-Weinreich (1981:77)[12] and Arora (1984), have shown that parallelism, both structural parallelism and semantic parallelism, is one of the most significant and frequently occurring internal devices in proverbs. Maghoub, in particular, has identified its presence in just less than one third of proverbs (31.7%) in her sampling of Cairene Arabic. Both Robinson (1945) and De Bric (1976) have made general comments that syntactic parallelism is extremely common in Irish proverbs, especially the previously mentioned formula 'Is fearr X ná Y – Better X than Y' (Robinson, 1945:4), – which, incidentally, Dundes (1975) has identified as one of the five most common

architectural or proverbial compositional formulas in English – and that parallelism, in general, features frequently in Irish folkloric items. De Bric (1976:35) goes on to say that it is also used in conjunction with both contrast and alliteration to assist its mnemonic and interpretative functions in proverb performance. There is no quantitative evidence to support such claims about Irish proverbs, however, so in this section of the paper the frequency of parallelism is discussed, and the various forms are analysed in conjunction with other types of proverbial marker.

Syntactic parallelism is found in over one quarter (27%) of the proverbs in the Irish sample corpus, and has the highest frequency value of all the formal devices examined in this paper, and it is worthy of note for comparative purposes that this figure is quite similar to its frequency in Cairene proverbs (31.7%). Syntactic symmetry is to be found between individual lexical items, phrases, and sentences, in both syndetic and asyndetic coordination. As can be seen in the following examples, Rothstein's (1968:279) claim that parallelism is the basis for comparison and antonymy is vindicated in our corpus, especially with regard to syndetic coordination, but there are also asyndetic examples in which a synonymous relationship is implied as in No. 23 where 'wisdom' comes with 'maturity'.

Syndetic coordination

20. *Is túisce deoch ná scéal*. (SM:§486)   Noun
    A drink is readier than a story.

21. *Is fearr súil le béal na con ná súil le béal na
    huagha*. (SM:§1700)   NP
    [It is] Better to expect hope from the hound's
    mouth than from the grave's mouth.

22. *Théid focal le gaoth agus théid buille le
    cnámh*. (RA:§130)   Sentence
    A word goes with wind (=unheeded) and a
    blow goes to bone.

Aysndetic coordination

23. *Crínneacht, cinnteacht*. (SM:§278)   Noun
    Maturity, certainty.

24. *Mac an duine shona, ábhar an duine dhona*. (SM:§1562)   NP
The son of the happy person, the 'makings' of the bad person

25. *(Is) Neantóg a dhóigh mé, (Is) cupóg a leigheas mé*. (SC:§3398)   Sentence
(It is) A nettle that stung me, (It is) a dock that cured me.

In Irish, the emphatic comparative copula structure has a syntactic structure that automatically generates parallel items – [COP ADJ-COMP X than Y] – and, as a result, is the source of much of the parallelism in our examples (10%). If we examine the lexical components in these proverbs in terms of the formal elements (*f*-elements) and content elements (*c*-elements) (Krikmann, 2009: 22-23), it is clear that in cases of two single words or simple phrases in parallel, there are limited possibilities for assigning poeticality to the *c*-elements.[13] However, on further inspection, it can be seen that there are optional poetical devices, such as rhyme, alliteration or lexical repetition, in all comparative proverbs, which would suggest that they have been intentionally designed as a poetic creation as opposed to being naturally occurring structures. These poetical devices also fulfil a mnemonic function to assist acquistion and recall of the proverbial material. The following example No. 26 highlights the poetic style of such proverbs with end rhyme between *madaidh* (madi:) and magaidh (magi:), and also lexical repetition of the noun phrase headword *fuíoll* (fi:l).

26. *Is fearr fuíoll madaidh ná fuíoll magaidh*. (SU:1564b)
Better the dog's leavings than mockery's leavings.
(is fʹaːr fiːl madi: na: fiːl magi:)

Phonic markers such as these are especially common in proverbs containing parallelism, with rhyme to be found in over a quarter (28%) and alliteration in almost two-thirds (39%). As often happens, both rhyme and alliteration are sometimes used in the same proverb (9%):

27. *Is fada an lá, is gearr an phingin, is tarraing do lámh go fada righin*. (SU:§802)
Long is the day, short is the penny and draw your hand long and slowly.
(is fadə ən laː, is gʹaːr ən fʹŋʹən', is tarəŋ' də laːv gə fadə riːn')

28. *Taise le trua agus troid le tréan*. (SC:§1325)
Compassion for the weak and battle for the strong.

29. *Deireadh ceatha ceo agus tosach catha gleo*. (SC:§4135)
Fog is the end of a shower (or rain) and noise is the start of a battle.
(dʹerʹuː kʹahə kʹoː agəs tosəx kaha gʹlʹoː)

There are also examples of the repetition of lexical items in reverse order in the latter half of the parallel structure, as in the formula (AB:BA). This rhetorical device, known as *chiamus*, both adds to the rhythmic pattern and emphasises the contrast (Talyor, 1931:140; Norrick, 1991:121):

30. *Glacfaidh gach dath dubh ach ní ghlacfaidh an dubh dath*. (RA:180)
Every colour will take black but black will not take (every) colour.

31. *Is fearr eolas an oilc ná an t-olc gan eolas*. (SC:§2108)
Better the knowledge of misfortune than the misfortunate without knowledge.

In many of our examples, antonymic lexical items are placed in opposition for purposes of contrast as can be seen with the lexical equivalence sets 'praise' versus 'condemn' and 'avoid' versus 'frequent' (No. 32), and with 'cold' versus 'hot' and 'summer' versus 'winter' (No. 33):

32. *Mol an mhónadh is seachain í; cáin an choill agus taithigh í*. (SU:§952)
[Imperative Verb + Article + Noun + Conjunction + Imperative Verb + Pronoun] X2
Praise the moor and avoid it; blame the wood and frequent it.

33. *Teallach fuar sa samhradh, teallach te sa gheimhreadh.*
(SC:§3838)
[Noun Phrase {Noun + Adj} + Simple preposition +
Noun] X2
A cold hearth in the summer, a warm hearth in the
winter.

Lexical parallelism is not always antonymic however, and in some examples lexical items show a thematic similarity for the purpose of semantic equivalence. In No. 34 there is an analogous relationship between the metonymic use of the body parts 'mouth and head' to signify 'speech and intelligence', but no established similarity or opposition between the qualifying adjectives 'closed' versus 'wise'. The organisation of the proverb along these symmetrical lines, and the choice of semantically-associated c-elements creates what Rothstein (1968:269) has termed 'syntactic crystallization' through which the elements are joined as a cohesive unit. The meaning emerges as a result – an intelligent person does not speak (too much):

34. *Béal druidte, ceann críonna.* (SM:§421)
[Noun + Adjective] X2
A closed mouth, a wise head.

Often in cases of syntactic parallelism there exists medial ellipsis, or what we may term 'gapping' (Greenbaum and Quirk, 1990:279; Fabb, 1997:147), within the second or subsequent element of the proverb. The omission of an element in the latter section of the proverb occurs as a result of its presence being tacitly understood from the initial corresponding symmetrical structure. Gapping is to be found in a number of proverbs containing asyndetic coordination as can be seen in the following example, where both the relativized form of the verb 'gets' [*a fhaigheann*] and the object 'cold' [*fuar*] are both present in the first sentence, whilst they are absent, yet implicitly understood, in the subsequent conjoin (No. 35). In the second proverb, No. 36, the negative imperative particle 'don't' [*ná*] is absent.

35. *As a ceann a fhaigheann an bhean fuacht; as a chosa an fear.* (SM:§168)

[Out of her head rel GET-PA the woman cold; out of his feet *rel GET-PA* the man *cold*]
Out of her head the woman gets cold; out of his feet the man.

36. Ná labhair go deo nó smaoinigh fá dhó. (SC:§658)
[NEG IMPER-speak never or *NEG IMPER* think twice]
Don't speak ever or don't think twice.

3.3 Parataxis

Parataxis ('equal' *para* 'arrangement' *taxis*) describes the linking of equipollent constructions – constructions of the same grammatical and semantic rank (Lakoff, 1971) – through juxtaposition or punctuation, as opposed to any form of explicit coordination or subordination by the use of a conjunction, or what may be termed hypotaxis ('beneath' *hypo* 'arrangement *taxis*).[14] As a result of this juxtaposition and positional contiguity, the subtle yet implicit connection between lexical items, phrases or clauses is inferred through various other means: logical, temporal and causal sequential linkages, or through manner (Wales, 2001:285). The overall effect of paratactic coordination is, therefore, to challenge the addressee to connect and interpret the grammatical and semantic relationships between adjacent constituents and to infer an overall unified meaning.[15] The most oft-quoted example of parataxis (asyndetic coordination) is Caesar's now proverbial use of hendiatris in the expression '*veni, vidi, vici* ('I came, I saw, I conquered'), in which three verbal phrases of equal weight and grammatical rank are juxtaposed for dramatic effect.

Parataxis is extremely common in ordinary speech and, by implication, in forms of oral literature including proverbs. The most significant studies of proverbial style have shown that parataxis is found in a range of international proverbs including, Ancient Greek, Arabic, Czech, English, French, German, Latin, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Yiddish.[16] Yet, in spite of its occurrence in these languages, often in conjunction with syntactic and semantic parallelism, and contrast, both Maghoub (1968:37) and Silverman-Weinreich (1981:76) in their statistical analyses do not view it as an important stylistic device in the overall hierarchy of proverbial markers. Irish proverbs concur with this observation and, in my own sampling, parataxis occurs in just 6% of the corpus and

thus it may be viewed as being one of the most infrequently-occurring stylistic devices. From these limited examples, however, some general conclusions may be drawn about its nature and form in Irish proverbs.

Firstly, from a syntactic point of view, it is significant that phrases are by far the most commonly juxtaposed element in the corpus (84%); in these examples simple noun, adjective, and adverbial phrases are set in juxtaposition using punctuation marks, such as the comma and semi-colon, as integrating links.

37. *Troid na mbó maol, troid gan aon dochas*. (SC:§4157)
    The fight of the hornless cows, a fight without any
    hope.

These phrases are not examples of elliptical constructions as the rules of Irish syntax exclude any form of verbal linkages on grounds of indefiniteness in the second phrase. Ellipsis of the verb, however, is a common feature of paratactic proverbs (Maghoub, 1968:37), especially the verb 'to be'. In Irish, as a VSO (Verb Subject Object) language, the potentially redundant verb does not occupy a central syntactic position separating parallel structures as occurs in English, for example, 'first come [is] first served'. Instead of this, we have the case in which the copula is placed in sentence initial position in identificatory sentences and followed by definite noun phrases [copula + pronoun/definite noun + pronoun/definite noun]. Some proverbs containing this sentence type demonstrate ellipsis of the initial copula and the subsequent concatenation of the two adjacent phrases by means of punctuation (in transcription, the punctuation mark, usually a comma, indicates a *pausa* in the utterance):

38. [Is é] *Fear an bhóthair, fear an allais*. (SC:§1542)
    The man of the road, [is] the man of sweat.

There is also evidence of the asyndetic coordination of simple sentences (4%), whilst compound sentences are not found in any examples. The other syntactically intricate sentence-types, the complex sentence and the compound-complex sentence, do not exhibit paratactic structures at all, as they are based on a subordinated or hypotactic clause relationship between the main clause(s) and var-

ious subclauses. Below is an example of juxtaposed simple sentences:

39. *Chan dual sagart gan cléireach; chan dual Domhnach gan aifreann*. (SU:§85)
It is not natural to have a priest without an altar-boy;
it is not natural to have a Sunday without a mass.

Hauser's (1980:26) general contention that there is a lack of 'conspicuous links' between juxtaposed constituents is not applicable to Irish proverbs, however, as they are highly adorned with other stylistic and poetic devices that serve to imply a correlation between the constituents. Such devices to signal noun phrase or clause relations include lexical repetition and parallelism, grammatical parallelism, and phonic devices such as rhyme and alliteration.

Lexical repetition usually occurs in Irish proverbs for contrastive purposes for, as Hoey (1991:20) points out, repetition creates a framework that focuses the addressee's attention on the new constituents that appear in the subsequent clause, or, in the case of the vast number of Irish proverbs, the subsequent phrase. We can see the repetition of the initial *fear gan* 'a man without' in No. 40, together with a single paradigmatic substitution of lexical item in the object i.e. *caint* 'chat' > *airgead* '*money*'. In many of these short proverbs, the final lexical element is the focal point of the expression for, in spite of the high level of syntactic predictability, until the final element is revealed the addressee cannot connect the entire semantic unity of the utterance:

40. *Fear gan chaint, fear gan airgead*. (SC:§4378)
A man without chat, a man without money.

In other examples, the effect of lexical repetition for contrastive purposes is buttressed by the use of antonymic adjectives and nouns in each phrase. These bring the addressee's attention to the salient differences between the phrases, and create a more complete arresting image. This can be seen in No. 41, where there are two clear examples of antonyms: '*pleasant* versus *morose*' and '*outside* versus *inside*'.

41. *Suairc an taobh amuigh, duairc an taobh istigh*.
(SU:1006)

Cheerful on the outside, gloomy on the inside.

Syntactic parallelism (or, for purposes of rhetoric, 'isocolon') is also a collocational feature of these proverbs, as it is this symmetry that signals a semantic correlation between constituents. It is also of note that these structures also contain other forms of poetic embellishment such as stress and rhythmic equivalence.[17] A prototypical example of such a literary creation can be seen below in which the two phrases not only possess the same syntactical structure of *Noun + Adjective + Noun in Genitive + Noun*, and the same initial lexical items i.e. *The end of every… [Deireadh gach]*, but they are also based on an identical initial consonantal pattern of *D-G-C-S*:

42. *Deireadh gach cumainn scaoileadh, deireadh gach cogaidh síoth*. (SC:§1679)
    The end of every relationship separation, the end of every war peace.

Phonic markers are one of the most characteristic devices of paratactic proverbs in Irish with rhyme occurring in nearly two-fifths of the examples (34%), as in No. 43, and alliteration found in well over one-half of the proverbs (59%), see No. 44. It is no surprise with these high frequencies that there are examples in which both rhyme and alliteration are found e.g. No. 45. These phonic markers occur in conjunction with varying degrees of lexical repetition and syntactic parallelism, and identify the proverbs as salient utterances that are quite distinct form normal original speech patterns.

43. *Fear gan bhean gan chlann fear gan bheann ar aoinne*. (SM:§339)
    A man without a woman or a family, a man without care for anyone.

44. *Bean gan leithscéal- bean gan phíopa gan pháiste*. (SU:157b)
    A woman without an excuse--a woman without a pipe or a child.

45. *Teanga bheadaí, tóin teasaí*. (SC:4996)
    A conceited tongue, a warm behind.

3.3.1 Relationship between juxtaposed phrases/clauses.

Phrasal proverbs demonstrate asyndetic juxtaposition in which the addressee is led to infer the meaning by means of some form of association between the first phrase and the second phrase. These associations are not always clear, especially when proverbs are presented in decontextualized form as in the printed collections, yet the use of other stylistic devices as outlined above, and knowledge of proverb performance enables the identification of distinct semantic relationships. It appears that there are three types of association implicit in the Irish corpus (i) Equality or Identification; (ii) Cause and Effect; and (iii) Antonymy or Contrast.

(i) Equality or Identification [X=Y]

The first category contains constructions determining equality or identity between the two phrases, in which the first phrase is equal to, or similar to, the second phrase, as in No. 46 where 'country without a language' is the same as or equal to 'a country without a soul'. The association between these proverbs may be schematically paraphrased by the formula [X = Y] as can be seen in the examples below:

46. *Tír gan teanga, tír gan anam*. (SM:§1044)
    A country without a language, a country without a soul.

47. *Tine gan teas, tine gan mhaith*. (SC:§5002)
    A fire without heat, a fire without goodness (=useless).

48. *Sagart balbh, sagart dealbh*. (SC:§2053)
    An inarticulate priest, a destitute priest.

(ii) Cause and Effect

Secondly, there are also proverbs in which a causal linkage is found and which loosely contains the 'cause and effect' or 'cause-consequence' sequence relationship (Boyle, 1996:118); the realization of the first phrase renders the second phrase a natural consequence. In No. 49 we can see that if the mother is light-footed then, as a logical consequence, we may presume that her daughter will also inherit the same quality. These proverbs may be read by

the closely-associated formulae [If there is X, then there is Y] or [If one has A, then one gets B]:[18]

49. *Máthair choséadrom iníon choséadrom.* (SM:§93)
     A lightfooted mother, a lightfooted daughter.

50. *Duine gan dinnéar beirt chun suipéir.* (SM:400)
     A person without dinner, two people for supper.

51. *Teanga bheadaí, tóin teasaí.* (SC:§4996)
     A conceited tongue, a warm behind.

(iii) Contrast and Antonymy

The final category contains a contrastive or antonymic function whereby the first phrase or sentence is set against the second for the purposes of contrast and comparison. The effect is to enhance the overall meaning of the two separate noun phrases by placing them in parallel to one another, so that meaning of the entire proverb is more important than the sum of the overall equal noun phrase constituents. For example, in No. 52, the first element, when taken alone, is quite innocuous, that, depending on our own reading of human interaction, the first year (of a relationship) is characterised by amorous displays of physical affection. The second half of the proverb, when taken in isolation, is not as transparent because the term 'second year' requires some form of antecedental reference for interpretation yet, from a literal perspective we may interpret that some form of physical abuse occurs in the second year. When the phrases are juxtaposed, however, and as a result of the syntactic and the antonymic lexical contrast of '*first* versus *second*', and '*kisses* versus *fists*', we are presented with a much fuller and, indeed, depressing interpretation of the breakdown of human relationships. These contrastive proverbs are the most stylised and lyrical and are based on bipartite and quadripartite syntactical repetition:

52. *An chéad bhliain, bliain na bpóg, an dara bliain, bliain na ndorn.* (SM:§330)
     The first year, the year of kisses, the second year, the year of fists.

53. *Lá brónach dá phósadh, lá deorach dá chur.* (SC:§683a)

A sad day for one's marriage; a tearful day for one's burial.

54. *Suí mhic i dteach a athar, suí leathan socair; Ach suí an athar i dteach a mhic, suí cruinn corrach.* (SU:§103)
A son's sitting in his father's house, a long comfortable sit; but a father's sitting in his son's house, a short, restless sit.

55. *Fear dubh dána, fear fionn glibiúil, fear donn dualach, fear rua scigiúil.* (SM:§6)
A black-haired man bold, a fair-haired man disheveled, a brown-haired man twisted, a red-haired man mocking.

3.3 Emphatic Word Order

In her seminal study on the concept of 'proverbiality', Arora (1984:11) identifies 'emphatic word order' as one of the most salient grammatical differentiators of proverbs from 'ordinary' linguistic utterances and says that when combined with other proverbial markers it may highlight a particular sentence as being 'proverbial'. The degree to which 'emphatic word order' registers on the hierarchy of proverbial markers will, of course, vary from language to language but, in the main, those scholars involved in analysing the stylistic and poetic devices used in proverbial expression have concurred with this general statement, albeit with various types of qualification. A comparison may be made between Yiddish and Cairene Arabic to demonstrate this difference. Silverman-Weinreich (1981:75) in her study of the formal characteristics of Yiddish proverbs has stated that emphatic word order is one of the most commonly-occurring 'optional' grammatical markers, and may be combined with other primary syntactic patterns such as conditional and comparative sentences, imperatives, riddle patterns, and rhetorical questions. She also notes that emphatic word order and syntactic parallelism appear to be mutually exclusive in the Yiddish material, even though both may be termed optional markers. In contrast, Mahgoub's (1968:32) quantitative and qualitative analysis of linguistic devices in Cairene proverbs does not verify the importance of emphatic structures or, as she terms it, 'inverted word order', as the device appears in only one single proverb from a corpus of 900.

The Irish language does not permit the emphasis or focusing of a constituent part of a sentence by prosodic means, yet it is possible to achieve this 'foregrounding' of a certain constituent by rearranging the normal word order and by using emphatic structures@uvm.eduor what we may, for the sake of consistency, term 'emphatic word order' (see Mac Eoin, 1986). Emphatic word structures take a number of different forms in Irish, and they are found frequently in the proverb samples gleaned from the corpus. The following discussion will highlight the use of these emphatic structures in proverbs.

One of the most frequent deviations from the normal word order in Irish (VSO) is that of fronting, in which the equivalent of cleft sentences in English is used to front constituents such as subject, object, adjective, verbal noun complement, as well as prepositional, adjectival and adverbial phrases. In a cleft sentence the focussed constituent is raised to the subject complement position of the sentence, where it is fronted by the copula and then followed by a relative clause. Emphatic, contrastive and exclamatory functions are the main motivations for generating such cleft constructions (Stenson, 1981:99). In Nos. 57-59 we can see how various constituent parts (Noun Phrase, Temporal Adverb, Prepositional Phrase) of the unmarked basic simple sentence, as in No. 58, are emphasised by clefting:

56. *Chuaigh Seán go Baile Átha Cliath inné.*
    Seán went to Dublin yesterday on the bus.

57. *Is é [Seán] a chuaigh go Baile Átha Cliath inné.*   (NP)
    It is SEÁN who went to Dublin yesterday.

58. *Is [inné] a chuaigh Seán go Baile Átha Cliath.*   (TEMP ADV)
    It is YESTERDAY that Seán went to Dublin.

59. *Is [go Baile Átha Cliath] a chuaigh Seán inné.*   (PP)
    It is TO DUBLIN that Seán went yesterday.

Cleft sentences in which emphasis or focus is applied to a particular constituent element are extremely common in Irish proverbs (13%). In the large majority of these proverbs, a simple sen-

tence (containing one clause) is re-structured to draw attention to one particular constituent element by presenting it at the beginning of the sentence directly after the copula. It should be noted that the copula is negated in only an extremely small number of examples (1.6%) of these cleft sentences. This, of course, reinforces the surface structure of the proverb and aids memorability, as it is generally accepted that a proverb is acquired and processed as a fixed lexical string (see Cram, 1983):

Noun Phrase

60. *Is é a leanbh féin a bhaisteas an sagart ar dtús*. (SU:§79a)   [COP +]
It is HIS OWN CHILD that the priest baptizes first.

61. Ní hí an áilleacht a chuireann an corcán ag fiuchadh. (SM:§255)   [COP –]
It is not BEAUTY that puts the pot boiling (=boils the pot).

Adverb/Adverbial phrase

62. *Is minic a bhí fear maith i seanbhríste*. (SM:§13)   [COP +]
It is OFTEN that a good man is in old trousers.

63. *Ní gan ábhar a théigheas na caoirigh chuig an abhainn*. (SC:§2341)   [COP –]
It is not WITHOUT REASON that the sheep go to the river.

Not all constituents are subject to high levels of fronting, however, and Stenson (1981:99-100) claims that there is a particularly low level of adjectival fronting in Irish because not all adjectives can be clefted freely, and because, on the whole, those that may be clefted are usually found in interrogative or exclamatory forms.[19] Ó Siadhail (1989:237), on the other hand, says that adjectival fronting is restricted to a contrastive function, as adjectives in fronted positions would demand a straight copula sentence as opposed to a cleft construction, see No. 64. These claims are borne out by our corpus sample in that adjectival fronting is extremely

rare (0.2%). This can be seen in No. 65, which clearly demon-
strates a declarative function:

64. *Is glas iad na cnoic i bhfad uainn.*
     (SU:§998)   [COP +]
     It is GREEN that the hills in the distance are.[20]

65. *Is sásta a bhíonn an bhó nuair a bhíonn an lao*
     lena chois. (SM:258)   [COP +]
     It is CONTENT that the cow is when the calf
     is beside it.

In Irish, as in many other languages, ellipsis is used to remove
predictable elements of the sentence for purposes of emphasis,
style and economy. The copula, being a highly-predicable verbal
element in sentence-initial position in cleft sentences, may be el-
lipted freely. 21 In spite of this, ellipsis of the copula is only found
in a small number of cleft sentences. Below are examples showing
the ellipted copula in proverbs and, as can be seen in No. 68, there
may be cases of multiple ellipted copulae due, in part, to the paral-
lel syntax in a compound complex sentence:

66. *[Is é] Uireasa a mhéadaíonn cumha.* (SM:§124)
     [It is] ABSENCE [that] increases loneliness.

67. *[Is] In am na cearra aithnítear an cara.* (RA:§324)
     [It is] IN THE TIME OF INJURY [that] the friend is
     recognized.

68. *[Is é] neart a ritheann agus [is é] mire a léimeann.*
     (SM:§233)
     [It is] STRENGTH that runs and [it is] MADNESS
     that jumps.

It should be mentioned at this point that the initial copula is often
ellipted in proverbs containing identificatory copula sentences.
This, however, is the typical syntactical structure (copula + pro-
noun/definite noun + pronoun/definite noun) for expressing the
identity of two nouns/pronouns, and does not relate to the gram-
matical process of clefting for the purpose of emphasis:

69. *[Is é] An chuid is lú den ól an chuid is fearr.* (SC:§3199)
     The smallest part of the drink [is] the best.

70. *[Is é] An fear óg an fear*. (SM:§2)
     The young man [is] the man.

3.3.1 Left-dislocation and topicalization

There are two other major syntactic devices for focussing or foregrounding a constituent element in a sentence: (i) left-dislocation and (ii) topicalization. Although similar in structure, there are differences in the type of clefting that occurs in these two constructions. In left dislocation (No. 71) the constituent element of the sentence is placed in sentence initial position, and an anaphoric element such as a pronoun, prepositional pronoun or lexical noun phrase is placed in its canonical position within the main clause that immediately follows. In topicalization, however, (No. 72), the focussed constituent of a sentence is placed in sentence-initial position through clefting so that it functions as 'topic', thus leaving a gap in the main clause which it can be construed as filling (Gregory & Michaelis, 2001:1665).

71. *An fear a bhain an duais, chonaic mé inniu é.*
     The man that won the prize, I saw him today.

72. *Cos ní chorródh sé.*
     Foot NEG would-move he
     He wouldn't budge. (Mc Closkey, 1996:80)

Left-dislocation is commonly used in spontaneous or narrative style, and also in cases where the topic contains a lengthy relative clause and where, as a result, the sentence meaning is confusing or ambiguous. Ó Siadhail (1989:213) demonstrates a typical source of such confusion in example No. 73 where it is unclear to what the adverbial clause 'this morning' refers – does it relate to 'I saw' or to 'the man who broke the window? To avoid such confusion, clefting may be used to clarify the meaning as shown in the example below where there is initial absolute topic with pronominal repetition (No. 74).

73. *Chonaic mé an fear a bhris an fhuinneog ar maidin.*
     I saw the man who broke the window this morning.

74. *An fear a bhris an fhuinneog, chonaic mé ar maidin é.*
     The man who broke the window, I saw him this morning.

Repetition of the topic through left dislocation is one of the most salient variations in basic word order in Irish and, as Ó Siadhail (1989:212) previously pointed out, is commonly found in proverbs, or what he terms ''maxim' type sentences beginning with *an té* 'he who'':

75. *An té nach mbíonn críonna, ní mhairfidh sé i bhfad.*
     He who isn't cunning, [he] won't survive long.

Evidence from the corpus sample shows a high-level of topic repetition through left dislocation (9%) and the particular example, alluded to above, of the 'maxim' type sentence beginning *an té* (he who) is found in more than one third of the total cohort (eg. Nos. 76-78). In these sentences the absolute topic is placed in initial position with nominal repetition in the main clause. Some examples are shown below:

76. *An té a bhíos idir dhá stól, gabhfaidh sé go hurlár.*
     (SC:§65)
     He who is between two stools, [he] will go to the
     floor.

77. *An té ná hólann ach uisce ní bhíonn sé ar meisce.*
     (SM:488)
     He who only drinks water, [he] will not be drunk.

78. *An té a luíonn leis na madraí, éireoidh sé leis na dreancaidí.* (SU:204)
     He who lies with the dogs, [he] will rise with the
     fleas.

The large majority of these examples containing the *an té* (he who) structure are complex sentences containing one independent clause and at least one sub-clause, but there are two examples of compound complex sentences in which there is also a second syntactically parallel structure which contrasts the semantic message of the initial structure. This rhetorical method of antithetic poetic parallelism contrasts the first and second sentence by setting the two in syntactic and sematic opposition through the fulcrum conjunction 'and'. Through the juxtaposition of sentences meaning is determined through the identification of key words and comparison to their antonyms. For example in No. 79 we see two clear

antonyms (i) *up* versus *down* and (ii) *to drink a drink on someone* (= to toast someone) versus *to lay a foot on someone* (= to oppress).

79. *An té a bhíonn suas óltar deoch air is an té a bhíonn síos luítear cos air*. (SM:§1383)
He who is up has a drink drunk on him (= is toasted) and he who is down has a foot laid on him (= is oppressed).

80. *An té atá bacach bíodh agus an té atá tuirseach suíodh*. (SM:§238)
He who is lame, let him be and he who is tired, let him sit.

The corpus sample also contains examples of three other structures, similar to *an té* 'he who', that are used recurrently as a base formula in sentences with left dislocation of this kind: *an áit* 'the place where' [(4%), *an ní* 'the thing that'(4%) and *an rud* 'the thing that' (31%). Once again, in these proverbs, the constituent element to be foregrounded is placed in the initial left position of the sentence and contains an anaphoric pronominal reference in the main clause that follows:

81. *An áit a mbeidh an diabhal caithfidh an deamhan a bheith ann*. (SC:§4544)
The place where the devil will be, the demon must be.

82. *An ní a deir gach uile dhuine, caithfidh sé bheith fíor*. (RA:§531)
The thing that everyone says, it must be true.

83. *An rud is beag ag fear is mór ag leanbh é*. (SM:§119)
The thing that a man does not appreciate, a child appreciates it.

Of course, there are also more specific examples of fronted noun phrase subjects containing a relative clause:

84. *An capall a phreabas is é a éimhíos*. (RA:575)
The horse that kicks, it is it that refuses (to jump).

85. *An grá nach bhfuil sa láthair fuaraíonn sé*. (SC:2528)
The love that is not present, it grows cold.

86. *An síol a bhíonn caoch sa chré ní thagann sé*. (SM:1804)
    The seed in the clay that is blind (=lacking a growing point), it does not sprout.
87. *An olann a bhíonn ag briseadh sa tsníomh bíonn sí righin sa tseol*. (SM:1206)
    The wool that breaks in the spinning, it is tough in the loom.

One feature that should be noted in relation to proverbs is Stenson's (1981:47) claim that simple NP subjects are incapable of being fronted in Irish sentences. Her view is that such fronting would be 'decidedly weird' and that it is restricted to complex NPs, perhaps just to relatives.[22] Evidence from the sample corpus shows, however, that this is not the case and that there are examples of left-dislocation and fronting of simple NPs. This type of fronting does not contain either a sentence-initial copula or relative clause in the post-frontal position. Once again, such proverbs have the hallmarks of a literary proverb with embellishment of both alliteration and syntactic parallelism for the purposes of memorability.

88. *Leanbh gan mháthair, ní binn é a ghol agus ní geal é a ghaire*. (SM:§109)
    A child without a mother, its cry is not sweet and its laugh is not happy.

89. *Moladh roimh ré, ní moladh é*. (SC:§2975)
    Prior praise, it is no praise.

90. *Duine le Dia, b'fhearr leis bia ná bean*. (SU:§93)
    A person with God (=pious person), he would prefer food to a woman.

3.3.2 Fronting of subclauses

There are also numerous examples of the fronting of subordinating clauses in Irish proverbs (15%), especially in conditional clauses. Conditional clauses have two forms in Irish: the particle *má* (negative form *mura*) is used to introduce a plausible conditional clause, or *realis* condition, whilst hypothetical conditional clauses, or *irrealis* conditions, follow are introduced by *dá* (nega-

tive form *mura*). The protasis is placed at sentence initial position and followed by the apodosis in 3.7% of the proverbs:

realis Condition

91. *Má ghránn tú an t-aoileach ní fheiceann tú dúradán / dúlagán ann.* (RA:563)
    If you are fond of the dung, you do not see a mote in it.

92. *Má bhíonn tú tanaí, lig ort bheith ramhar.* (SC:1603)
    If you are thin, pretend that you are fat.

irrealis Condition

93. *Dá mbeadh síoda ar ghabhar, is gabhar i gcónaí é.* (SC:1962)
    If a goat were to wear silk, it is still a goat.

94. *Dá mbeadh spré ag an chat is minic a phógfaí a béal.* (SC:3423)
    If the cat had a dowry, it is often that its mouth would be kissed.

The complementary subordinating particle *nuair* (when), which takes the form of the direct relative clause, is found in 35 of the proverbs. It is of interest that the sub-clause is fronted in over three-quarters of the total (77%), which suggests that this emphatic word order is commoner in proverbs that take the form of complex sentences:

Normal word order

95. *Labhair leis an donas nuair a thiocfas sé.* (SU:524)
    Speak to misfortune when it arrives.

Fronting

96. *Nuair a bhíonn an leabhar againn ní bhíonn an léann againn.* (SM:1621)
    When we have the book, we do not have learning.

97. *Nuair a bhíos an cupán lán, is fusa a dhoirteadh.* (SC:252)
    When the cup is full, it is easiest spilled.

3.3.3 Emphasis in classificatory copulative sentences

In classificatory copula sentences in Irish (copula + classifica-tory indefinite noun + pronoun/definite noun e.g. Is fear é [COP + man + he]) it is possible, for the purposes of emphasis, to front an adjective that qualifies a noun by placing it after the copula and then making the noun definite:

98. *Is fear mór é.*
     He is a big man.

99. *Is mór an fear é.*
     (COP big the man he)
     He is a BIG man.

The use of fronting for emphasising an adjectival qualifier in a classificatory copula sentence is a stylistic device used in 1.9% of the proverbs. What is of interest in these examples is that the ma-jority are metaphorical proverbs containing some incongruity of tenor and vehicle domain. Not only that, but the qualifying adjec-tive *maith* (good) is used in the majority of these proverbs, sug-gesting that this may be a common proverbial formula. In example Nos. 100-101 the quality of 'its being good' is emphasised:

100. Is maith an scáthán súil charad. (RA:323)
     A friend's eye is a GOOD mirror.

101. Is maith an scéalaí an aimsir. (SM:1946)
     Time is a GOOD storyteller.

The final category contains the pattern in which the abstract noun denoting degree is used for purposes of comparison:

102. *Dá dhonacht gabhaltas bíonn oidhre dó.* (SC:2718)
     However bad the holding there is an heir for it.

103. *Dá fhaid é an lá is é dán na hoíche teacht.* (SM:1988)
     However long the day is it is the fate of the night to
     come.

104. *Dá fheabhas an t-ól is fearr an t-ithe.* (SC:446)
     However good the drinking the eating is better.

105. *Dá mhéad an lán mara tráigheann sé.* (SU:1246)

However great the high tide, it subsides.

3.3.4 Comparative Copulative Structures

The copula is found in over a half of the corpus (53%) and it is significant that it is used in this form of emphatic comparison in 21% of these proverbs. The emphatic copulative structure is derived from the unmarked base form containing the substantive verb (BÍ):

106. *Tá X níos fearr ná Y*
     (X is better than Y) (6.3%).

107. *Is fearr X ná Y*
     [COP + COMP ADJ +] (10% of corpus sample).

The comparative structure, or what Thompson (1974:40) terms the 'value comparison', is highly proverbial due to its attachment to the bible and has been widely found in wisdom literature of the Middle East (see Humbert, 1929). Robinson (1945:4) concurs with the pervasiveness of the comparative structure in Irish and identifies the structure *Is fearr X ná Y* (Better X than Y) as one of the most salient syntactical structures in Irish-language proverbs since earliest times. It is of note that this particular construction was found in 10% of our present sample, whilst a negated form was also found in three examples (eg. No. 112). The comparative structure, of course, also means that syntactic parallelism occurs in nearly all those with adjectives, nouns, noun phrases being compared. Of interest, however, is that these expressions contain many other proverbial markers, which would indicate that these are highly stylized expressions. Key features of these proverbs are phonological devices such as rhyme and alliteration, semantic contrast and semantic parallelism, and, of course, syntactical symmetry:

108. *Is fearr an tsláinte ná na táinte.* (SM:134)   [Rhyme]
     Better health than wealth.

109. *Is fearr sona ná saibhir.* (SU:759)   [Alliteration]
     Better happy than wealthy.

110. *Is fearr orlach gasúir ná troigh*
     *chailí*n. (SU:116)   [Semantic parallelism]

Better an inch of a boy than a
foot of a girl.

111. *Is fearr madra beo nó leon
marbh*. (SM:2087)   [Antithetical parallelism]
Better a living dog than a
dead lion.

112. *Ní fearr luathlámhas ná léireacht*.
(SM:1283)   [Alliteration]
Dexterity is not better than clearheadedness
(accuracy)

Although this 'Better X than Y' formula has a high frequency
within the corpus sample, there are some other examples based on
the syntactical structure but with various other comparative adjec-
tives:

113. *Is buaine clú ná saol*. (RA:183)
Fame is more enduring than life.

114. *Is fusa scaipeadh ná cruinniú*. (SU:774)
Scattering is easier than collecting.

115. *Is airde fear céachta ar a chosa ná duine uasal ar a
ghlúine*. (SM:1790)
A ploughman on his feet is taller than a nobleman on
his knees.

116. *Is faide a rachas an fíor ná an bhréag*. (SC:2403)
The truth goes further than the lie.

117. *Is measa na mná ná an t-ól*. (SC:4316)
The women are worse than the drink.

118. *Ní measa pisreog ná cat*. (SC:46a)
A superstition is not worse than a cat.

4. Conclusion

By means of summary, we can say that Irish proverbs are
nearly always based on some form of sentence structure, although
a small percentage (of around one in every ten) take the form of a
phrasal construction. Irish permits the use of phrasal proverbs,

which is at odds with other languages in which the proverb must be a complete grammatical sentence e.g. Igbo proverbs (see Ezejideaku and Okechukwu, 2008). The simple sentence is the proverbial structure *par excellence* in Irish, (57%) although the complex sentence is also common (27%). Compound structures are found in only a small minority of proverbs (8%). In terms of length, Irish proverbs are generally quite 'short' (the mean length of an Irish proverb is 6.5 lexical items) as a result of the high frequency of simple sentences and phrasal structures, although there are exceptions, which echoes Whiting's (1994:80) claim that 'It is usually short, *but need not be…*'.

In terms of syntactic devices and style, parallelism is one of the most frequently occurring aspects of Irish proverbs with over one in four proverbs containing structural parallelism, through either syndetic or asyndetic coordination (27%). Structural parallelism is inevitably accompanied by semantic parallelism in which both synonymous and antonymic relationships are also found between contiguous constituents. Euphonic markers are particularly common in parallel structures also, with rhyme found in over a quarter (28%) and alliteration in nearly two-fifths (39%). The distinct patterns of syntactic relations, repetition of consonantal patterns, and the presence of elaborate euphonic markers, indicate that many of the proverbs are based on formulaic poetical structure and may have originated as what Taylor (1931) has termed 'literary' proverbs.

Paratactic structures are not overly common in Irish proverbs and are only found in a small percentage of proverbs (6%). In spite of this, there are clear patterns associated with this device. Irish proverbs tend to favour the juxtaposition of phrases as opposed to any sentence structure constituents (94%), although simple sentences are also found in a small minority (6%). The three relational classifications between constituents are (i) equality or identification, (ii) cause and effect, (iii) contrast and antonymy. These proverbs are also adorned with rhyme (34%) and alliteration (59%), and stylistically tend to violate the usual rules of speech in that, due to the poetical aesthetic, they appear 'out-of-context' (Seitel, 1973: 124). The highly mnemonic nature of such adornment assists in their perpetuation and re-use.

Emphatic word order, in its various manifestations, is a frequent characteristic of Irish proverbs for the purposes of fore-

grounding and contrast. Clefting of constituents to sentence initial position is common (13%) and, on occasion, ellipsis of the initial copula occurs due to redundancy. Left dislocation is another frequent syntactic device (9%) and there are several architectural formulae that belie these proverbs including relative clauses beginning '*An té*… (He who…), *An áit*… (Where there is…), and *An rud/ní*… (The thing…). There are also numerous examples of regular fronted noun phrases that do not follow these patterns. Irish proverbs also demonstrate the fronting of subclauses, particularly conditional and adverbial clauses ('if' and 'when') (15%), as opposed to normal word order. Fronting of adjectival qualifiers in classificatory copulative sentences, although not common (1.9%), is the norm for metaphorical proverbs containing incongruity between topic and vehicle domains.

APPENDICES

Table 1. Frequency and distribution of sentences / phrases in corpus sample.

Sentence / phrase type	Distribution	
	n	%
Simple sentence	565	57%
Compound sentence	81	8%
Complex sentence	274	27%
Compound complex sentence	11	1%
Phrase(s)	69	7%
Sum	1000	100%

Table 2. Word length in sentences / phrases in corpus sample.

Sentence / phrase type	Total words in proverb type	Average word length
Simple sentence	5876	10.4
Compound sentence	470	5.8
Complex sentence	2823	10.3

Compound complex sentence	114	10.4
Phrase(s)	295	13.4
Sum	9578	9.6

Table 3. Frequency of syntactic devices in the sample corpus.

Syntactic device	n	%
Syntactic parallelism	265	27%
Parataxis	56	6%
Cleft sentences	130	13%
Left dislocation	92	9%
Subclausal fronting	152	15%

Table 4. Distribution of phonic markers in proverbs containing syntactic parallelism.

Proverbial marker	Syntactic parallelism	
	n	%
Rhyme	74	28%
Alliteration	103	39%

Notes

[1] Kilimenko (1946) [*Russian*], Mahgoub (1968) [*Cairene Arabic*], Rothstein (1968) [*aspects of Russian, French, Latin*], Levin (1968) [*Russian*], Thompson (1974) [*Hebrew, Arabic*], Silverman-Weinreich (1978) [*Yiddish*], Hasen-Rokem (1982) [*Hebrew*], Russo (1983) [*Ancient Greek*], Arora (1984) [*Spanish*], Sorrentino (1989) [*Tamil*], Tóthne Litovkina (1990) [*Hungarian, Russian*], Norrick (1991) [*English*], Tóthné Litovkina and Csábi (2002) [*American English*], Valdaeva (2003) [*English*], Osoba (2005) [*Yoruba*], Agozzino (2007) [*Welsh*], Ezejideaku and Okechukwu (2008) [*Igbo*], Fidler (2010) [Esperanto] and Grandl (2010) [Ancient Egyptian].

[2] Milner (1969), Dundes (1975) and Barley (1974).

[3] The industrialist and antiquarian, Robert MacAdam, had originally published six hundred proverbs in the *Ulster Journal of Ulster Archaeology* between 1858-1862 (Ser. 1, Vol. VI, pp. 172-83, 250-267, 1858; Vol. VII, pp. 278-87, 1859; Vol. IX, pp. 223-36, 1861-2), and these were subsequently included in *Seanfhocla Uladh*. Fionnuala Carson Williams has published a critique of this work entitled 'Six Hundred Gaelic Proverbs Collected in Ulster by Robert MacAdam.' *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Prov-*

erb Scholarship. Vol. 12, (1995) pp. 343-55. MacAdam's collection has been edited and reprinted together with an introductory chapter on his 'life and times' by A. J. Hughes (1998) *Robert Shipboy MacAdam: his life and Gaelic proverb collection*.

[4] See Mac Coinnigh (2005) for an examination of proverbial sub-types in the Irish language.

[5] See Mac Coinnigh (2007) for an analysis of Irish paremiography in the 19th and 20th centuries, focussing on these three dialectal collections, and suggestions for future desiderata in the field.

[6] See www.random.org 'RANDOM.ORG offers true random numbers to anyone on the Internet. The randomness comes from atmospheric noise, which for many purposes is better than the pseudo-random number algorithms typically used in computer programs. People use RANDOM.ORG for holding drawings, lotteries and sweepstakes, to drive games and gambling sites, for scientific applications and for art and music. The service has existed since 1998 and was built and is being operated by Mads Haahr of the School of Computer Science and Statistics at Trinity College, Dublin in Ireland.'

[7] Chenevix Trench (1905) in his pioneering study of proverbs also contests the use of 'shortness' in relation to proverb definition, and suggests that 'conciseness', i.e cut down to the fewest possible words; condensed quintessential wisdom, would be a more suitable term. Once again, however, this is not always the case and many common proverbs could be reduced further by the omission of redundant verbs or parallel elements.

[8] According to Ó hAnluain (1985:18-19), there are four types of sentence structure to be found in the Irish language (i) Simple sentences; (ii) Compound Sentences; (iii) Complex Sentences, and (iv) Plural Sentences (often referred to as Compound-Complex Sentences).

[9] Fabb (1997:145) make the distnction between structural and syntactic parallelism stating that the latter involves structural identity in terms of classes of words and phrases, grammatical and thematic relations to the predicator, and word order in each section.

[10] Rothstein (1968:269) has argued that parallelism fulfils three main functions in proverbs: (i) the aesthetic function of organizing the proverb along symmetrical lines; (ii) the semantic function of suggesting analogies and comparisons through syntactic juxtaposition, and (iii) a kind of syntactic crystallization, with which to unite the elements of the proverb as a cohesive whole.

[11] 'A rhetorical trait which is found is parallelism of structure with its almost inevitable accompaniment, contrast' (Taylor, 1931:143).

[12] 'Ellipsis of the verb (usually accompanied by other stylistics features such as parallelism or contrast) is another important grammatical clue (of proverbiality)' (Silverman-Weinreich, 1981:77).

[13] ''We treat the proverb text as internally heterogeneous and try to divide its lexical components into "content elements" (*c*-elements) and "formal" elements (*f*-elements)...the essence of this approach is that it does not assign poeticalness to the proverb text as a whole – poeticalness is assigned only to some elements of it, e.g., to c-elements.' (Krikmann, 2009: 22-23).

[14] It should be noted that some scholars, including De Vries (2008), Fowler (1996) and Turner (1973) include co-ordination within the definition of parataxis whilst others, particularly Short (1996), and Wales (2000), adhere to the belief that this does not fit within the paratactical matrix. In this study I have taken parataxis as fulfilling the latter function.

[15] 'The lack of conspicuous links between the parts presents the audience with disjointed and seemingly unrelated elements, causing the audience to ask questions and use its imagination in an attempt to fill the gaps and relate the adjacent members to one another. As a result of its search, the audience comes to see that the elements which initially seem to exist independently of one another, or even to clash, are in fact part of a more basic unity which lies behind all the parts.' (Hauser, 1980:26).

[16] See Arora (1981); Mahgoub (1968); Rothstein (1968); Russo (1983); and Silverman-Weinreich (1981).

[17] O'Rahilly (1920) has identified the provenance of many of these expressions, stating that they were originally poetic constructions of the Early Modern period, and that they were composed by professional poets of the bardic class. He classifies them under the term 'dánfhocail' – or epigrams based on syllabic verse.

[18] For a broader examination of parataxis in fixed expressions, proverbs and sayings in English, including many productive examples, see Culicover, Peter W. (2010). *Parataxis and Simpler Syntax*. In Marie José Béguelin, Mathieu Avanzi, Gilles Corminboeuf, eds., *Actes du 1er Colloque International de Macrosyntaxe*, Vol. 2. Peter Lang.

[19] *Nach dána atá tú*! Aren't you BOLD!

[20] EXCLAMATORY USAGE. 10.3.2 (i) Here we have COPULA + ADJECTIVE + PRONOUN / DEFINITE NOUN. The range of adjectives permitted here is extremely limited. Only adjectives describing a permanent quality and expressing a subjective estimation are allowed. Once more the '*é, í, iad* insertion rule' applies here. The rule operates in Munster and Connacht. The insertion rule is not found in Donegal. (Ó Siadhail, 1989:229)

[21] Ó Siadhail points out that ellipsis of the copula is not possible in all constructions: '(the copula) may not normally be deleted when marked for mood, tense, negation, interrogation or when embedded in a sentence.' (1989:244)

[22] 'Sentences like (81) are decidedly weird: (81) * *Na Sasanaí, tháinig siad go hÉirinn sa mbliain 1172*. (the-PL English, come-PA they to Ireland in-the year 1172) 'The English, they came to Ireland in 1172' (Stenson. 1981:47).

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