

Lesson 43

Focus Marker

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–hóo

Suffix (any): Focus Marker

In English we use a combination word order and stress to emphasize a certain word in a sentence—to move the “focus” of the sentence onto that word. For example, in a simple declarative sentence like “The book is red,” if we need to emphasize that it’s the book (and not some other thing) that’s red, we can say “The BOOK is red,” or “It’s the BOOK that’s red,” or a number of other things. Similar processes would be employed to emphasize that RED (rather than some other color) is the color of the book, or that the book IS (rather than “isn’t,” or “was,” or “will be,” or “ought to be”) red.

Láadan word order is fairly inflexible, and emphatic stress is not employed. So we must find some other mechanism to emphasize one part of a sentence over another. The Focus Marker, “–hóo,” is that mechanism.

When I questioned Dr. Elgin about the use of “–hóo,” I got the following response:

English has several kinds of emphatic stress. The one that’s used in “It wasn’t Tuesday morning, it was WEDNESday morning” is called “contrastive stress.” Another is what I call “announcement stress,” as in “That was the PRESIdent on the phone!” And then there’s the emphatic stress a speaker gives to a word or a part of a word simply to indicate that that element is the part of the language sequence that matters most to him or her and is being foregrounded, with stress as the foregrounding mechanism.

Láadan uses “–hóo” for all three of those kinds of emphasis.

Adverbs

In the lesson on the Manner Case, we briefly discussed “true adverbs.” There was one English example we had no Láadan counterpart for: “even;” the Focus Marker fulfills that functionality in Láadan.

Even Margaret can run to the shop.

Bíi thad yime Mázhareth behóo
wehedim wa.

MARGARET can run to the shop.

This simple set of examples illustrates how “true adverbs” can change the meaning of a sentence as their placement within that sentence changes. It’s clear here that the speaker is not impressed with Margaret’s ability to run—and it’s likely that the shop is very near.

Margaret can even run to the shop.

Bíi thad yimehóo Mázhareth wehedim
wa.

Margaret can RUN to the shop.

Here, the speaker assumes that Margaret could get to the shop, but the statement here is that the shop is near enough that she could run the whole way; Margaret’s physical prowess is granted to be equal to the task.

Margaret can run even to the shop.

Bíi thad yime Mázhareth wehedimehóo
wa.

Margaret can run TO the shop.

Margaret can run TO the SHOP.

Bíi thad yime Mázhareth wehehóodim
wa.

Margaret can run to the SHOP.

Here, on the other hand, Margaret’s ability to run is being touted, and the shop is implied to be some distance off.

In the Láadan translations of this third example, the emphasis is ambiguous in that either that Margaret can run “TO the shop” (–dim is receiving the Focus), or “TO the SHOP” (wehedim as a whole is receiving the Focus), or “to the SHOP” (wehe alone receives the Focus, resolving the ambiguity); this will be discussed further below.

Examples

Bíi laya áabe wa.

The book is red.

Bíi layahóo áabe wa.

The book is RED.

Bíi layahóo áabe, léli ra wa.

The book is RED, not yellow.

Bíi laya áabehóo wa.

The BOOK is red.

Bíi laya áabehóo, ra thodi wa.

The BOOK is red, not the writing implement.

Bíi erilehóo laya áabe; ril léli be wa.

The book WAS red; now it's yellow.

Bíi laya áabe netho wa; léli hi lehóotho.

Your book is red; MINE is yellow.

The above illustrates focusing for the purpose of foregrounding as well as contrastive focusing.

Bíi eril ban Mázhareth nemeth ledim wa.

Margaret gave me a pearl.

Bíi eril ban Mázhareth behóo nemeth ledim wa.

MARGaret gave me a pearl!

Bíi eril ban Mázhareth nemethehóo ledim wa.

Margaret gave me a PEARL!

Bíi eril ban Mázhareth nemeth lehóodim wa.

Margaret gave ME a pearl!

Bíi eril ban Mázhareth nemeth ledimehóo wa.

Margaret gave a pearl TO me!

Margaret gave a pearl TO ME!

This is meant to be announcement focusing. The final two examples also illustrate another response received from Suzette Haden Elgin to an inquiry whether the focus marker would always be placed at the end of the word, or if it might be placed immediately following the morpheme (meaningful word-part) that the speaker wants to emphasize:

Like placing emphatic stress in spoken English, the focus marker gets placed where it will genuinely indicate what is most important to the speaker of the utterance. Some placements are going to be far more likely than others, certainly, and it may sometimes be a struggle to place it properly, but it's at the discretion of the user.

That means that we can place the Focus Marker directly after any part of the word we want to emphasize. In the middle of a word that's perfectly clear. But when the part that needs emphasis is at the end of the word, the result is ambiguous as to whether it's the last part or the whole word that we wanted to emphasize.

Báa ril bel Ána losh lethoth maridim?

Is Anna taking/bringing my money to the island?

Báa rilehóo bel Ána losh lethoth maridim?

Is Anna, RIGHT NOW, taking/bringing my money to the island?

Báa ril belehóo Ána losh lethoth maridim?

Is Anna TAKing/BRINGing my money to the island?

Báa ril bel Ána behóo losh lethoth maridim?

Is ANNA taking/bringing my money to the island?

Báa ril bel Ána loshehóo lethoth maridim?

Is Anna taking/bringing my MONEY to the island?

Báa ril bel Ána losh lehóothoth maridim?

Is Anna taking/bringing the money belonging to ME to the island?

Báa ril bel Ána losh lethohóoth maridim?

Is Anna taking/bringing the money BELONGING TO me to the island?

Báa ril bel Ána losh lethothehóo maridim?

Is Anna taking/bringing MY money to the island?

Is Anna taking/bringing MY MONEY to the island?

Báa ril bel Ána losh lethoth marihóodim?

Is Anna taking/bringing my money to the ISLAND?

Báa ril bel Ána losh lethoth maridimehóo?

Is Anna taking/bringing my money TO the island?

Is Anna taking/bringing my money TO the ISLAND?

The ambiguity in the eighth example above is whether the emphasis is on the Object status of “my money” or on the whole word saying that whatever-it-is (the money, in this case) belongs to me and is the Object of the sentence—or, arguably, since this is a Possessive structure and can be perceived as a single unit, the emphasis is on the entire phrase “losh lethoth” (my money as an Object).

The ambiguity in the last example above is more straightforward. Does the speaker/writer intend to emphasize the direction the money is being taken/brought (just the Goal Case suffix, “-dim”) or the whole word, “maridim” (to the island)?

Vocabulary

bad
mineral
badazh
metal [bad (mineral) + ?dazh (pliant)?] {SH}
balinemid
turtle; tortoise [balin (old) + mid (creature)]
dalatham
berry [dala (plant) + tham (circle)]
dol
root (as of a plant)
lel
seaweed
luben
map
sheshi
sand
sheshihoth
beach [sheshi (sand) + hoth (place)]
uhudemid
tick (the arachnid) [uhud (nuisance) + mid (creature)]

The question-marks around the etymology of “badazh” indicate that no official etymology has been supplied; this is a guess as to the thought process of the person who coined this word.

Exercises

Translate the following into English.

1 Bée thi ra Aranesha sheshihotheth nedebehóo, i raho leleden wáa.

E: _____

2 Bé aril beth letho boshethuhóo, ra badazhethu wa.

E: _____

3 Báa methel lodáhóo bebáath hibosha nedeбенil; badeth nedaba?

E: _____

4 Bóo bithim na lalomáth—e báa erilehóo nahan na bith?

E: _____

5 Bó ril ne, eduthahá, thóo ebaláhóothom yedesha, ra belidáthom wa.

E: _____

6 Bí eril ulanin Shuzhéth edanethehóo ulineya, ra elamitheth wáa.

E: _____

In #3, please note that “hibo” (hill) is given in the Place Case. Just as in English, wherein we can “get” something “at” a Place or “from” a Source, the Láadan verb “thel” (to get; to obtain) takes the person or place whence the Subject acquires the Object as the Source and the location where the Subject acquires the Object as the Place.

The English word “already” means that an action spoken of as beginning at some specified time was actually begun at a time previous to that. In #4, I’ve translated the Láadan “erilehóo nahan” (PAST + FOCUS | BEGIN + be acquainted) as “already know,” in an example of contrastive focusing.

Move the focus to the supplied word; translate into English before and after.

7 Bíi thóshumáadehóo balinemid Ána betho mari sheshithudim we.

tortoise

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

8 Bée ra bash ubem; be uhudehóom hath menedebe wi.

balm

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

9 Bé eril wem Méri lanemidehóo bethoth imeya wa.

Mary

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

10 Báa rilrili shihóo bini letho Elízhabeth beth?

me

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

11 Bíi Máyel zhahóo nethom wo.

your

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

12 Bíi ril delishe Bétheni ra olobewáan izh sholanewáanehóo wáa.

weep

E: _____

L: _____

E: _____

In #9, you did remember to split the Focus suffix onto a “be” pronoun, didn’t you? Remember, we don’t put affixes on the names of living or once-living persons or animals.

In #11, did you note the effect of the Focus marker on a possessive? It changes the simple possessive, eg “my,” to a much more emphatic version, eg “my own” or “my very own.”

In #12, did you note the construction “ra olobewáan?” We’ve seen the straightforward “olobewáan” (because of trauma) and the Cause-reversed “olob rawáan” (despite trauma; disregarding the effects caused by trauma). This is a middle course: “ra olobewáan” (not because of trauma).

Translate the following into Láadan.

13 Will your family go NORTH, not east, using a map and meet us-many again on the plain?

L: _____

14 (DIDACT) Clearly COURTESY, not being right, causes harmony.

L: _____

15 (CELEB) I swear there's a GARDEN in the center of the meadow!

L: _____

16 The farmer told me, "(MAND) Do NOT touch the tick!"

L: _____

17 (WARN) The pregnant woman SIGNED, rather than called, "Hello," to her sibling.

L: _____

18 (LOVE) Prithee, beloved-you-few, ARRIVE at the berry farm during the evening.

L: _____

Regarding #18: in English, we say that someone "arrives at" their destination; this seems like it would translate into a straightforward Place Case formation. In Láadan, however, "to arrive" is "nosháad" [no- (FINISH) + sháad (come/go)]. Sháad takes "the place one is coming/going to" as a Goal Case rather than a Place Case element. There is no reason why the simple addition of the "FINISH" prefix would change that case assignment. Therefore the phrase "arrive...at the farm" in #18 must be translated as "nosháad...ábededim" rather than "nosháad...ábedesha."

Answers

- 1 (WARN) I understand Arkansas doesn't have even a few beaches, and none with seaweed.
- 2 I promise my house will be of WOOD, not of metal.
- 3 Which mineral are the HOUSEHOLDERS getting among the several hills?
- 4 Prithee, beloved-you, meet the singer—or do you already know honored-her/him?
- 5 (MAND) Be you, physician, the guest of the BAKER in the valley, not of the carpenter!
- 6 I understand Suzette studied LINGUISTICS in school, not mathematics.
- 7 I dreamt Anna's tortoise just FLEW to the island of sand.
Bée thóshumáad balinemidehóo Ana betho mari sheshithudim we.
I dreamt Anna's TORTOISE just flew to the island of sand.
- 8 (WARN) Clearly, common sense is not a balm; often it's a NUISANCE.
Bée ra bash ubehóom; be uhudem hath menedebe wi.
(WARN) Clearly common sense is not a BALM; often it's a nuisance.
- 9 I swear Mary lost her DOG while traveling.
Bé eril wem Méri behóo lanemid bethoth imeya wa.
I swear MARY lost her dog while traveling.
- 10 Might my gift PLEASE Elizabeth?
Báa rilrili shi bini lehóotho Elízhabeth beth?
Might MY gift please Elizabeth?
- 11 I'm guessing Michael is your NAME.
Bíi Máyel zha nethohóom wo.
I'm guessing Michael is your very own name.
- 12 I understand Bethany is crying not because of trauma but BECAUSE OF ALONENESS.
Bíi ril delishehóo Bétheni ra olobewáan izh sholanewáan wáa.
I understand Bethany is WEeping not because of trauma but because of aloneness.
- 13 Báa aril sháad onida netha lubenenan hunehóodim, ra henedim, i nebithim leneth rabosha?
- 14 Bíidi nin shalehóo, ra dóon, shath wi.
- 15 Bélan déelahóo hatham dunethusha wa.
- 16 Bíi eril di ábedá ledim wa, "Bó dama rahóo ne uhudemideth."
- 17 Bée eril lishidehóo, dithed ra, wolawida wowith, "Wil sha," hena bethadim wáa.
- 18 Bóoli menosháadehóo nabh ábed dalathamethudim háanáaleya obée.