

Lesson 60

Identifier Case, Pt 2

Verb Prefixes in Identifier Case

[(Aux) “in” [verb: **exist**] (Neg) CP–S CP–Identifier]

The Identifier Case structure identifies its Subject with another Case Phrase; it states what the Subject “is” in terms of gender, profession, nationality, and so on. But what if the identification isn’t so straightforward? What if the Subject is “trying to be” or “beginning to be” or “being again” whatever-it-is? The verb has that “null surface form” (we can’t see or hear it), so we have no apparent verb to which to attach the verb prefixes that would make all those more tenuous Identifier relationships work. At this point, I emailed Suzette Haden Elgin for help. My questions are in italics, Dr. Elgin’s responses are in roman type.

The correspondence, below, between me and Dr Elgin predates the adoption of the case suffix “-m” for the Identifier Case. At that time, the Identifier Case used a null suffix (like the Subject Case). We will not be using the null Identifier suffix in these lessons, but you may happen upon it when reading older texts—such as the below—and should be familiar with it.

The Identifier case makes it easy to say “Bíi le omá wa” (I am a teacher). But we have all these nifty verb prefixes that modify the verb [...]. How would we incorporate these meanings into an Identifier structure—where the verb has a null surface form?

Let’s do it the way we do DO-SUPPORT in English. [That is, when we want to do a negative, a question, or an emphatic sentence in English, we insert “do”; it’s just there to carry the negative/question/emphasis. As in: “I didn’t sing”; “Did I sing?”; “I did sing!”]

Láadan has a verb, “in,” that means “to exist.” Just insert it in the Identifier-case sentence and let it carry the prefixes. So... “Bíi le omá wa.”—I am a teacher. “Bíi nahin le omá wa.”—I’m beginning to be a teacher. “Bíi nóhin le omá wa.”—I’ve stopped being a teacher.

Examples

Our basic Identifier case sentence for these examples is:

Bíi ril Ána omám wa.
Anna is a teacher.

When needed, we insert the verb “in” (to exist) to carry the prefixes that allow the Identifier structure to convey more than a bare equivalence:

Bíi ril duhin Ána omám wa.
Anna is trying to be a teacher.
Bíi ril dúuhin Ána omám wa.
Anna is trying in vain to be a teacher.
Bíi ril nahin Ána omám wa.
Anna is beginning to be a teacher.
Anna is becoming a teacher.
Bíi ril náhin Ána omám wa.
Anna is continuing to be a teacher.
Bíi ril nehin Ána omám wa.
Anna is a teacher again.

Bíi ril nóhin Ána omám wa.
Anna is ceasing to be a teacher.
Bíi ril nohin Ána omám wa.
Anna is finishing being a teacher.
Bíi ril théhin Ána omám wa.
Anna is about to be a teacher, any minute now.
Bíi ril théehin Ána omám wa.
Anna is about to be a teacher, but not any minute.
Bíi ril thóhin Ána omám wa.
Anna has, just now, been a teacher.

At last we can see the derivation of the verb “nahin” (become), introduced in Lesson 28, and why the “after” form is rendered in the Identifier Case.

The “do-support” model using “in” (to exist) is very elegant. Using the Identifier structure with [“in,” I can now use all those verb prefixes]. Now, can we take it one small step further? Can we use “in” as the second verb in a verb complex?

If you needed “in” in your embedded sentence—to carry verb prefixes, for example—you’d keep it. Otherwise, I don’t understand what its function would be or why it is needed.

Bíi ril néde Ána omám wa.

Anna wants to be a teacher.

Bíi ril néde nehin Ána omám wa.

Anna wants to be a teacher again.

Bíi ril néde inehóo Ána omám wa.

Anna wants to BE a teacher.

The rule when embedding is that the embedded clause always begins with a verb or an auxiliary. The verb in an Identifier case structure usually presents a null surface form—a problem for embedding them. When embedding Identifier case structures, when no auxiliary is appropriate, would we use “in” as the verb that begins the embedded clause?

I have no objection to using “in” as the verb when embedding a sentence that has an Identifier [noun phrase] as its predicate.

Bíi néde Ána in Ána omámehé wa.

Anna wants that Anna be a teacher.

Bíi ril menéde ehá mehin bezh omámehé wa.

The scientists want that they be teachers.

Note that the first example above (the full embedding to disambiguate the first example in the previous set) would be awkward. Human languages do not like to repeat identical information within a connected discourse without very good reasons—in this case to explicitly resolve some ambiguity.

Note also, in the sets of sentences that comprise the rest of this lesson’s examples, that we needn’t use “in” to begin embedded clauses if the clause begins with an auxiliary. This is because the rule for embedding states that an embedded clause begins either with a verb or with an auxiliary. Of course, even in the presence of an auxiliary, if we were going to use one of the verb prefixes, we would use “in” to carry the prefix.

Bíi néde Ána in le omámehé wa.

Anna wants that I be a teacher.

Anna wants me to be a teacher.

Bíi néde Ána rilrili le omámehé wa.

Anna wants that I might be a teacher.

Bíi néde Ána rilrili nahin le omámehé wa.

Anna wants that I might begin to be a teacher.

Anna wants that I might become a teacher.

Bíi di ra Ána in le omámehée wa.

Anna doesn’t tell whether I am a teacher.

Bíi di ra Ána eril le omámehée wa.

Anna doesn’t tell whether I was a teacher.

Bíi di ra Ána eril dúuhin le omámehée wa.

Anna doesn’t tell whether I failed to be a teacher.

Báa di in ehá omámeháa?

Is the scientist who is a teacher speaking?

Báa di aril ehá omámeháa?

Is the scientist who will be a teacher speaking?

Báa di aril nohin ehá omámeháa?

Is the scientist who will finish being a teacher speaking?

As we’ve seen before, because the Identifier clause generally presents a verb with a null surface form (invisible and inaudible) the conjunction “úmú” has taken only one noun phrase, which represents the Subject of an Identifier clause whose Identifier case phrase, together with the English copula, are represented by the conjunction. When we have affixes for the null-presenting verb in such clauses, we use “in” to carry them; this makes the “úmú” clause much more consistent with other “úXú” clauses.

Bíi di Ána úmú omá wa.

Anna tells who the teacher is.

Bíi di Ána úmú duhin omá wa.

Anna tells who the teacher is trying to be.

Bíi di Ána úmú aril omá wa.

Anna tells who the teacher will be.

Bíi di Ána úmú aril duhin omá wa.

Anna tells who the teacher will try to be.

That noun phrase can be represented by a Possessive structure or an Embedded Relative clause, since both fulfill a case role just like a noun or pronoun, as shown below:

Bíi di Ána úmú omá netho wa.

Anna tells who your teacher is.

Bíi di Ána úmú nahin omá netho wa.

Anna tells what your teacher is beginning to be.

Anna tells what your teacher is becoming.

Bíi di Ána úmú eril omá netho wa.

Anna tells who your teacher was.

Bíi di Ána úmú eril nahin omá netho wa.

Anna tells who your teacher was beginning to be.

Anna tells who your teacher was becoming.

Bíi di Ána úmú om eháháa wa.

Anna tells who the scientist who teaches is.

Bíi di Ána úmú nóhin om eháháa wa.

Anna tells what the scientist who teaches stops being.

Bíi di Ána úmú aril om eháháa wa.

Anna tells who the scientist who will teach is.

Anna tells who the scientist who teaches will be.

Bíi di Ána úmú aril nóhin om eháháa wa.

Anna tells what the scientist who teaches will stop being.

Vocabulary

eduth

engineering [e- (SCIOF) + duth (to use)]

eduthemid

beaver [eduth (engineering) + mid (creature)]

elosh

economy [e- (SCIOF) + losh (money/credit)]

emath

architecture [e- (SCIOF) + math (building)] {YML}

eri

history [e- (SCIOF) + ri (to record; keep records)]

eróo

agriculture [e- (SCIOF) + róo (harvest)]

eyon

administration [e- (SCIOF) + yon (government)]

ezho

acoustics [e- (SCIOF) + zho (sound)]

léeli

jonquil [léeli (yellow)]

memazh

train [me- (larger, more important) + mazh (automobile)]

We first saw “yon” (government) in Lesson 28; “eyon” (administration) isn’t, perhaps, the most transparent “science of” formation from an English standpoint, but it may say something significant about the culture embodied in Láadan.

Exercises

Translate the following into English.

1 Báa ril théehin ra Elízhabeth emidám?

E: _____

2 Bí ril thónahin belid bethem wa.

E: _____

3 Bí eril néde wobalin wowehehá ímám wáa.

E: _____

4 Báa medibé meduhin Yáanezh mewothal wothulem? Bere em, bé aril den le wohonal wa.

E: _____

5 Bí héeya ra ábedá aril be ninálhemehéth we.

E: _____

6 Bí en onida náhin nime nathademehéth wa.

E: _____

7 Bí eril medibáa háawith in homana thizhem e thuzhemehée(th) wa.

E: _____

8 Bí aril mebedi ilá nehin zho alehalemehéeth wa.

E: _____

9 Báa azháadin in duthahá hothul nethameháa?

E: _____

10 Bídu meloláadeháalish with woho zhanath beróo dúuhin rashonelh shonem wa.

E: _____

In #4, did you note the word “wohonal”? *Formally*, postpositions (such as “woho”) do not accept case suffixes; therefore, “in every way” would have to be translated “wethenal woho” [weth (road/path/way) + -nal (MANN)] [woho (all/every)]. *Informally*, however, “wohonal” will be clearly understood and, as such, is perfectly acceptable Láadan.

Translate the following into Láadan.

11 The musician tried in vain to be a singer.

L: _____

12 Bethany and Michael are studying engineering; they’ll commence being engineers next month.

L: _____

13 Your (honored you) niece is showing signs of being a philosopher.

L: _____

14 [warning] Magic Granny intends to stop being Anthony’s neighbor in two weeks.

L: _____

15 Astronomers teach us that our sun is a star.

L: _____

16 Do you (many) believe that the prisoner must be my enemy?

L: _____

17 Margaret Brown remembered whether the holiday was torment.

L: _____

18 The housekeeper knows who is finished being a criminal [skeptical].

L: _____

19 Their great-aunt Carol was acquainted with the leaves that were herbs.

L: _____

20 Does the nurse care for the drinker (not an alcoholic) who is ceasing to be a clergyman?

L: _____

Of course you had no trouble with “alehalehá” (musician) and “lalomá” (singer) in #11 or with “eduthá” (engineer) in #12. They are all straightforward “-á” (doer) formations from “alehale” (music), “lalom” (sing) and “eduth” (engineering), respectively.

Answers

- 1 Isn't Elizabeth about to be a zoologist?
- 2 The house has just become a home.
- 3 The old storekeeper wanted to be a traveler.
- 4 Do you young people promise to try to be good parents? If so, I promise to help in every way.
- 5 The farmer isn't afraid that she will be the one to blame (I dreamed).
- 6 The family understands that to be willing is still to begin to be able. OR ...that willingness continues to be the beginning of ability.
- 7 The children asked whether dessert was pie or cake.
- 8 The spectators will learn whether the sound is music again.
- 9 Is the healer who is your grandmother menopausing uneventfully?
- 10 [poetic] Everyone feels extraordinarily keenly regret (ext cause, no blame, remedy) because the war is failing to be peace.
- 11 Bíi eril dúuhin alehalehá lalomám wáa.
- 12 Bíi mehulanin Bétheni i Máyel edutheth; menahin bezh eduthám hathóoleya aril wa.
- 13 Bíi ril dam sherídan nitha ehenám wa.
- 14 Bée nédeshub nóhin Shósho obeth Átheni bethom híyahatheya shin aril wáa.
- 15 Bíidi mehom ehashá in rosh lenetho ashemehéth lenedim wa.
- 16 Báa mehedeláad nen dush zhihad leb lethomehé?
- 17 Bíi eril dom Leyaneshem Mázhareth in díidin rashemehée wáa.
- 18 Bíi lothel elodá nohin bebáa ibálhemehée waá.
- 19 Bíi eril an Hérel hoberídan benetha mehin mi theshemeháath wa.
- 20 Báa naya onin nóhin ranahá wíithamidemeháath?