Interrogatives in Muskerry Irish

Standardised Irish accepts a variety of usages found in the various Irish dialects. However, learners of a particular dialect will be seeking detailed information on usages in the dialects they are learning. I aim here to clarify interrogative usages in Muskerry Irish, based on the works of Peadar Ua Laoghaire and the stories and folklore of Amhlaoibh Ó Loingsigh. Learners will be interested in whether forms such as cén and cén fáth are found in the dialect, and in how to express in Irish sentences such as “who am I?”, “what am I?” and “how hot is it?”, which turn out to be harder than expected to put into Irish.

Cad?

Although some Irish interrogatives seem to have a range of meanings, it seems best to order the presentation under the Irish words (cad) and not the English words (what?). The most fundamental interrogative is cad? “What?” is cad and not cad é (other than in copula usages, where the é is a subsubject as discussed below) or céard in the dialect. Usage of interrogatives with relative clauses illustrates the way in which relatively advanced grammar is required to express simple concepts in Irish. Usage with the substantive verb (tá, deir and the copula (is) requires separate comment. Let us first take a look at usage with other verbs:

1. Cad a thuigeann tú le neamh? (An Teagasg Criostaidhe, p11)

We see here that cad along with other interrogatives requires a relative clause, in this case a direct relative clause, shown by the leniting relative particle a.

2. Cad fhéadfadh aoinne amháin a dhéanamh? (Mo Sgéal Féin, p101)

In Standardised Irish, the relative particle is always written out, which may indicate to learners an unnatural pronunciation. Before vowels, the relative particle has a zero pronunciation and it was traditionally acceptable not to write out an unpronounced implied relative particle. A possibly clearer compromise would be to use the spelling cad ’fhéadfadh?, /kɑd iətəx/.

3. Ní fheadar ó thalamh an domhain cad dhéanfaid siad. (Séadna, p145)

4. Cuir rómhat ar maidin cad a dhéanfair. (Aithris ar Chriost, p33)

The relative particle may also be omitted (in pronunciation and in writing) in the exclamatory or rhetorical expression cad ’dhéanfad! (“what on earth shall I do?”) and related conjugated forms, as shown in (3) above, where the exclamatory expression is used as a noun clause in a longer sentence. As (4) shows, where the phrase has its normal (non-exclamatory) sense, it often, in the works of Ua Laoghaire, shows the relative particle. (We should note, however, that in the Irish of Ó Loingsigh, as transcribed semiphonetically by Donncha Ó Cróinín, no elision of the relative particle in an exclamatory cad a dhéanfad! is shown.)

5. “Seadh, a gharsúin”, arsa’n sagart, “cad tá uait?” (Mo Sgéal Féin, p51)

6. Cad deir Murchadh? (Niamh, p65)

Sentence (5) shows that the relative particle is not heard between cad and the substantive verb. The spelling cad atá has been standardised on, but /kɑd tɑ:/, or often /kɑ tɑ:/ (see The Irish of West Muskerry, p59), is the pronunciation in the dialect. The recording of the Irish of the Clare native Liam Ó Dileáin held in the Doegen archives shows that in some parts of Munster the relative particle was heard where the t was lenited: /kɑd ə’ha:/; the /kɑ ə’tɑ:/ form taught to learners of Standardised Irish cannot be recommended to learners of Muskerry Irish. Sentence (6) shows an
analogous situation: the relative particle is not heard in cad ’deir sé?, cad ’duairt sé? and similar sentences.

Difficulties mount with the copula. The construction cad is X ann? is a general way of asking what an indefinite abstract noun is.

7. Deir Pílát leis: Cad is firinne ann? (Na Cheithre Soisgél, p279)  
8. A Thighearna, is duit-se is eól cad is maith, agus conus. (Aithris ar Chriost, p128)

Gerald O’Nolan explained in his Studies in Modern Irish: Part 1 (p48) that sentences like cad is ainm duit? appear to contain an elipsis. He argues that the subject of the copula is really (an ainm is) ainm duit. This forms part of his argument that the copula cannot stand next to the subject in any copula sentence. Consequently, in (7) (rud is) firinne ann may be inferred as the underlying subject. In (8) we see a slightly different example, where (rud is) maith may be inferred as the underlying subject of the sentence.

By contrast, in the following constructions, where identification of a specific definite noun is being requested, the copula is deleted in the present tense, with the syntax of the construction being PsS, where P (the predicate) is cad, s is a subsubject (é or another third-person pronoun) and S the subject.

9. Cad é an luacht saothair a thug Dia do na h-aingiolaibh d’fhán dílis? (An Teagasg Criosdaidhe, p14) 
10. Cad i an onóir a bhairmid di? (An Teagasg Criosdaidhe, p24) 
11. Cad iad na h-úrnaighthe is mó a chómhairlighthe díinn do rádh? (An Teagasg Criosdaidhe, p23) 
12. Caidé an scéal athá agaibh? (Scéaltaiocht Amhlaobh, p7) 
13. Cad é an tslighe, cad é an áit, are what is said. Not cad i an tslighe, etc., though the words are feminine. (Notes on Irish Words and Usages, p127). 
14. Cad é an ainim atá ar an gnúc móir san? (Mo Sgéal Féin, p78) 
15. Agus nuair airmigh sé an tsluagh ag gabháil thairis d’fhiafraigh sé cad ab é sin. (Na Cheithre Soisgél, p200) 
16. Is ceist churaidh ar lucht eóluis cad é an brigh a bhí ag Íosa leis an gcaintm sin, cad a ciallúightear leis an georpán, agus cad ab iad na fiolair. (Criost Mac Dé, Vol 3, p356)

English often uses an interrogative adjective where Irish uses an interrogative pronoun: (10) may be translated “what is the honour that we give her?” but is more naturally “what honour do we give her?” in English. The subsubject is é, i or iad, depending on the subject. However, note Ua Laoghaire’s comment in (13) and his frequent coupling of é with an ainim (Ua Laoghaire’s preferred spelling of ainm, whereby he clarified the epenthetic vowel), an áit, an chúis, mo thuatirim and similar phrases in copula sentences. One way of explaining this would be to argue that the masculine subsubject anticipates in a general way the predicate that gives the answer to the interrogative question. Examples of a past-tense copula, which is not deleted, are very rarely found, but an example of cad ab é sin is given above in sentence (15), “he asked what it was”. Sentence (16) contains a clause with a past-tense copula meaning “what were the eagles?”

The interrogative pronoun does not combine with the article to produce cén or cé na in the dialect. Sentence (12) and Donncha Ó Cróinín’s general approach to the transcription of Ó Loingsigh’s Irish in Scéaltaiocht Amhlaobh (where we find caidé, caidí and caidiad) shows that the d of cad may be slenderised before the pronoun (bearing in mind that a slender d is not fully palatalised in Muskerry Irish; /d/ is pronounced on the alveolar ridge). However, in The Irish of West Muskerry, Brian Ó Cuív transcribes Ó Loingsigh’s pronunciation of cad í an chúis and cad é sin as /kɑd i: n xu:/
and /gəˈðeːʃin/ respectively (pp93, 109), with a broad d in each case.

The phrase *cad i an chúis* is worthy of note, as Ua Laoghaire consistently wrote *cad é an chúis*, and Scéalaithe Amhlaibh consistently has caidé an chúis (e.g. p27 and elsewhere). Yet *cad i an chúis* is what was given by Ó Loingsigh on this occasion: the transcription on p93 of *The Irish of West Muskerry* is of the story *Seán Gadaighe*, the recording of which is online in the Doegen archives, allowing us to verify that i was indeed the pronoun used. Ó Cuív states that the *c* of *cad* becomes /g/ only occasionally. A pretonic vowel (such as the *a* in *cad i* or *caidi*) tends to retain its quality where the subsequent stressed vowel is /i:/ (p105 therein).

In the examples in (9) to (14), *cad* asks for identification of something, in other words, identification of a definite subject. Where a classification (of an indefinite noun) is being sought, the subject contains a relative clause using *rud* or *saghas*:

17. *Cad é an rud Céile Dé, a Pheig?* (Séadna, p99)
18. *Ansan iseadh thaisbeáinann Tú dhom féin mè, cad é an saghas mè, cá rabhas, agus cá bhfuilim tagaithé; òir is neamhníd mè, agus ní raibh 'fhios agam é.* (Aithris ar Chriost, p113)
19. *Ní fheadramair go minic cad 'tá ar ár gcumas, ach taisbeáinn an cath cad é an saghas sinn.* (Aithris ar Chriost, p22)

*An rud Céile Dé* in (17) contains ellipsis of a relative clause: “the thing that a Culdee is”, producing “what is the thing that a Culdee is?, i.e. what is a Culdee?” We notice immediately that there is a difference in construction between *cad is X ann?* in (7) and *cad é an rud X?* in (17). It seems that a definite noun referring to a specific thing that may be pointed to or referred to would use the latter construction; more general questions about abstract nouns call for the former.

* *Cad me* or *cad mise* are not found in Ua Laoghaire’s works: the correct form is found in (18) above, *cad é an saghas me?* (once we adjust mé to me in line with the true pronunciation). Where classification of a person is referred to, Ua Laoghaire uses *saghas* rather than *rud*. Sentence (19) shows that the same construction, with a singular *an saghas*, is used to define plural pronouns in the subject. The forms are therefore as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>cad é an saghas me?</em></td>
<td><em>what is your thing?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>cad é an saghas tu?</em></td>
<td><em>what is your thing</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>cad é an saghas é?</em></td>
<td><em>what is your thing</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>cad é an saghas sinn?</em></td>
<td><em>what is our thing?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>cad é an saghas sibh?</em></td>
<td><em>what is your thing</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>cad é an saghas iad?</em></td>
<td><em>what is our thing</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

20. *D’àirigheas-sa duine ’ghá rádh gurab iad rudai na siobhraí, ’ná aingil an uabhair agus na deamhain aeur.* (Séadna, p176)

Sentence (20) does not contain an interrogative, but it is worth bringing it in here to note the use of *iad rudai*. The reason why *rudai* is plural is because the elves (*siobhraí*) are being defined, not as one category, but as more than one category of thing: *aingil an uabhair agus na deamhain aeur*. We note in passing that the definite article is omitted here because *rudai* is defined by a later clause beginning with ’ná. I cannot find examples in Ua Laoghaire’s works of a plural *rudai* or *saighseanna* after *cad*, but it is likely that if a plural response were expected, in other words, if the subject were expected to be defined as more than one category of thing, we would find sentences like *cad iad na rudai iad san?* (“what various things are these?”) and *cad iad na saighseanna sinn?* (“what various sorts of people are we?”).

21. *An Tighearna.- A mhic, tá a lán neithe le foghlaim fós agat nár fhoghlaimis go dtí so ach go h-olc. An Seirbhíseach.- Cad iad na neithe iad san, a Thighearna?* (Aithris ar Chriost,
Sentence (21) shows that *cad iad na neithe* (and *cad é an nídh* in the appropriate context) is also found in similar constructions in Ua Laoghaire’s works. This confirms our view that a plural subsubject *iad* and a plural noun in the subject phrase are used where the response is expected to contain more than one noun.

These forms (*cad*+a personal pronoun in the subject phrase) are generally present-tense. In English, any combination of tense can be easily formed, however rarely required in speech (“what was I?” “what will I be?” “what would I have been?”, etc). We might assume from *cad ab é sin?* above that a past-/conditional-tense form could be posited: *cad ab é an saghas me?* (and with multiple predicates anticipated, *cad ab iad na saighseanna sinn?*). In fact, while phrases such as *cad ab áil leat de?* and *cad ab ainm di?* abound, *cad ab é sin?* and *cad ab iad na fiolair?* are the only examples I’ve located of *cad ab* followed by a third-person pronoun.

Graiméar Gaeilge, a reference grammar of Standardised Irish, accepts both *cad é sin?* and *cad sin?* (§13.77), Ua Laoghaire’s works do not contain any examples of *sin/san* on its own used as the subject of such sentences. However, (22) below may be understood to indicate that *cad san?*, if it were found, would have a slightly different meaning to *cad é sin?*

22. Besides the demonstratives “*é seo,*” “*é sin,*” and “*é siúd,*” we have the forms “*so,*” “*san,*” and “*súd.*” These latter forms point out things taken in a body, or collectively. For example, *is olc é sin,* that is a bad thing. But *is olc san uait-se,* that course of action is bad on your part. (Notes on Irish Words and Usages, p123)

23. If one hears some astounding or unexpected news, or is told some false and foolish story, he might suddenly exclaim — *cad é sin agat dh’á rádh? Cad é an rud é sin?* is said in regard to given objects. *Cad é sin?* is used to distant and unknown objects, and as exclamations of surprise and doubt. (Notes on Irish Words and Usages, p125)

Ua Laoghaire’s explanation of the difference between *cad é an rud é sin?* and *cad é sin?* in (23) is the same as (and probably the ultimate source of) that given in Graiméar Gaeilge, §16.14. Ua Laoghaire also wrote that the pronoun *ea* can be used with *cad*, but only with the intervention of the copula. His view that *ea* is really a noun is idiosyncratic:

24. In questions we have *cad é*, *cad i*, and *cad iad*. But if *eadh* is to be used we must say *cad iseadh*. The reason is that the word *eadh* is really a substantive, and not a neuter pronoun. It means the truth of a statement, just like the English word “fact.” The true English of *iseadh* is “it is a fact.” *Cad iseadh?* corresponds to the English, “*what?*” or “*what is that?*” i.e., what is the statement you have made? (Notes on Irish Words and Usages, p124)

The following sentences show (as also in Graiméar Gaeilge, §13.85) that where *cad eile* is found in the predicate the interrogative pronoun may be reduplicated:

25. *Airiú, cad eile cad ’tá agat, a Shíle?* (Mo Sgéal Féin, p40)
26. *Cad é an rud eile bhéadh uatha, a Niamh?* (Niamh, p280)

This construction was explained by Ua Laoghaire in an undated letter to Shán Ó Cuív held in the G,1276 collection of manuscripts in the National Library of Ireland:

*Agus cad eile cad dúbradar?* is what I have always heard in all questions of that sort. ‘What else is it?’ is in Irish always ‘What else what is it?’ *Cad eile cad é an nídh é?* ‘What else did he do?’ = *Cad eile cad a dhein sé?* ‘What else could I do?’ = *Cad eile cad fhéadfinn*
It's important to note the double meaning of *cad eile cad* (“what?” and “wherein lies the difference?” combined), as Ua Laoghaire pointed out. Although Ua Laoghaire stated above that *cad* is “always” reduplicated, he also often used a single *cad*, as in the following sentence, indicating that it was not always necessary to give a double meaning to a *cad* clause.

27. *Cad eile dh’fhéadfimís a dhéanamh!* (Sgothbhaladh, p104)

Where a preposition is used with the interrogative, it is used in the form of a prepositional pronoun placed directly after *cad* and an indirect relative clause is required:

28. *Cad leis go samhlóchaimíd righeacht Dé?* (Na Cheithre Soisgéil, p97)
29. *Cad air gur féidir duit-se gearán, a dhuine gan ghus?* (Aithris ar Chriost, p125)

A *cad*-clause can be directly governed by a preposition, as shown in the following example where St. Peter denies Christ:

30. *Agus do bhís-se le is bhfochair Íosa Nasareit. Agus do shéan seisean agus dubhairt: Ní’l fios ná eóls agam ar cad deirír.* (Na Cheithre Soisgéil, p131)

Finally, while the primary meaning of *cad* is “what?”, there are meanings that may be less obvious to a learner of Irish. *Cad as duit?* and, less frequently, *cad as tu?* mean “where are you from?” *Cad as* is also used to form indirect relative clauses meaning “where from?”, as in (33):

31. “*Cé h-iad sibh?” arsa Íosue leó, “agus cad as daoibh?”* (Sgéalaideachta as an mBiobla Naomhtha, Vol 2, p124)
32. “*Admuighim,” ar sise ansan le muinntir an rí, “go dtáinig a leithéidí anso, ach ni raibh fhíos agam-sa cad é an saghas iad ná cad as iad.*” (Sgéalaideachta as an mBiobla Naomhtha, Vol 2, p106)
33. *Cad as go bhfuil cómhacht ag na sácramintí chum grása thabhairt dúinn?* (An Teagasg Criosdaidhe, p24)

The use of *cad* to mean “why?” is discussed elsewhere here. Usages of *cad* with definite nouns to mean “how?” in expressions of degree and with abstract nouns in rhetorical exclamatory expressions are also discussed elsewhere here.

*Cé?*

“Who?” is *cé?* in the modern language. This is followed by a direct relative clause. However, the relative particle cannot be heard after *cé* and is thus often not written out in traditional Irish, either being elided entirely in the orthography or represented by an apostrophe. The substantive verb may be lenited in such circumstances.

34. *Dhein Murchadh agus Dúlainn gáirí a ndóthin nuair a chonacadar cé bhí acu.* (Niamh, p231)
36. Cé dúbhairt go raibh? (Séadna, p108)
37. Cé thá a’ teacht? (Scéaltaíocht Amhlaoiabh, p77)

Once again, the copula is shown after cé where the copula phrase appears to contain an elipsis; see (38) and (39) below. Otherwise, the copula is deleted after cé in the present tense, with the syntax once again PsS:

38. Annsan beidh ’fhios againn cé is rí ortha. (Lughaidh Mac Con, p36)
39. Agus pé cathair nó dúin n-a raghaidh sibh isteach ann, fiafraighidh cé is creideamhnach ann, agus fanadh ansan go dtí go mbeidh sibh ag imtheacht. (Na Cheithre Soisgíl, p25)

40. Do thug m’Athair dóm-sa gach uile nídh, agus ní h-eól d’aonadh cé h-é an Mac ach do’n Athair, ná cé h-é an t-Athair ach do’n Mhac agus do’n t-é d’ár toil leis an Mac é dh’fholaissiú. (Na Cheithre Soisgíl, pp173-174)

41. “Ach! a rí,” arsa Dáibhid leis, “cé h-é mise, nú cé h-iad mo mhuinntir, nú ce h-é m’athair, nú ca bhfuil aon chreideamhaint againn i n-Israél chun a rádh go mbeinn-se am’ chleamhain ag an rí!” (Sgéalaideachta as an mBiobla Naomhtha, Vol 3, p377)

42. D’innseas di cé r’ b’ é mé. (Mo Sgéal Féin, p126)

The present-tense forms are cé hé or cé hiad, etc. In the past tense, the form cérbh is found before the subsubject. D’inseas di cé r’ b’ é mé in (42) is a typo for cé r’bh’ é mé.

Ua Laoghaire commented as follows on a sentence found in Vol III of his Sgéalaideachta as an mBiobla Naomhtha and explains that the subsubject before thusa has to be é, even in reference to a woman:

43. Cé h-é thusa? (Sg. III. 321), not cé h-i thusa? Although it was a woman. One woman asks another, an bhfuil fhios agat cé h-é me? never, cé h-i me. (Notes on Irish Words and Usages, p125)

Third-person pronouns do not require a subsubject, as shown in (45) below.

44. Is truagh chráidhte nár innsis dom fad ó cér’ bh’é thu. (Lughaidh Mac Con, p40)
45. Chromas-sa ar bheith ag cur tuairisge na gcomhras an air, féachaint cé r’ bh é iad a bhi imthighthe anno... (Mo Sgéal Féin, pp179-180)

In §13.85, Graiméar Gaeilge gives cé eile cé roimhe a bhfuil eagla ort?, which appears to be based on the following sentence of Ua Laoghaire’s, the original form of which shows that cé eile cé and not cé eile cé is desirable, in traditional Muskerry Irish at any rate. (A large number of sentences in Graiméar Gaeilge appear to be based on Ua Laoghaire’s Irish, although the source is unattributed.) There are examples in Ua Laoghaire’s works of cé eile: it seems the use of cad eile cé was particularly useful here given the need to fit in the prepositional pronoun roimis after cé.

46. Cad eile cé roimis go bhfuil an t-eagla agat? (Táin Bó Cuailnge ’na Dhráma, p85)

As with cad, a preposition may be used with cé in the form of a prepositional pronoun placed directly after cé, with an indirect relative clause required:

47. Ach cé leis go samhlóchad an tsliocht so? (Na Cheithre Soisgíl, p28)
48. Féach chúghaidt féin, agus tuig cé dhó gur deinadh seirbhiseach diot nuair a chuir lámh an Easboig san Ord Beannuighthe thá. (Aithris ar Chriost, p254)

Indirect relative sentences with the copula after cé are a thorny area of grammar:
49. Cé leis an íomháigh seo agus an sgríbhinn seo? (Na Cheithre Soisgéil, p62)
50. Do bhual sé fé dhéin na ceártan maidean, agus do chonaic sé roimis ar aʼ mbóthar an gini breá óir. “Féach,” aduairt sé. “Cad a chuir ann é, ní fheadar, nú cér leis é?” (Scéalaíocht Amhlaoibh, p76)
51. Fé dheire do h-innseadh cé go mba leis an t-arbhar. (Cé go mba leis is often shortened to cé ’mba leis.) (Notes on Irish Words and Usages, p133)
52. “Is cuma linn na gceártan maidean indé é,” arsa na h-Arabaigh, “ach is linn na indiú é, agus cimeád-fimid é.” (Sgéalaídeachtaí na Macabéach, Vol 2, p189)
53. Ní fheadar cé h-i ná cér ’ro diobh i. (Séadna, p208)
54. Tá fhios aige cé ’ra mac tu. (Niamh, p144)
55. Céra peictiúir é sin? (Seanachas Amhlaoibh, p365)
56. Ní raibh fhios acu cé ’ra mac é. (Séadna, p208)
57. Cía dar ab inghean thú? (Genesis 24:23)
58. Cía léar leis thu? & cáit a racha thú? & cía léar leis íad so rómhad? (Genesis 32:17; I here transcribe the Tironian with an ampersand)
59. Cía ar leis an cailínsi? (Ruth 2:5)
60. Cía dhar mac an tóginachsa? (1 Samuel 17:55)
61. Cía ler leis an dúithche? (2 Samuel 3:12)
62. Cía dár ab íomháig so & cía ré a mbeann an sgríbhinn so na thimcheall? (Matthew 22:20)
63. Créud do chithear dhíbhse a dtimcheall Chríosd? cía dár mac é? (Matthew 22:42)

Cér or céra are thus abbreviations of forms not limited to cé gurab(b), but also including cé dára(b), cé léra(b) and cé ar(b). The sentences I have located show that in Ó Laoghaire’s Irish the indirect relative form of the copula is entirely deleted before leis in the present tense, as in (49), or alternatively cér is found in the same circumstance in (50) in Ó Loingsigh’s Irish. In the past tense, note Ó Laoghaire’s use of go mba after cé in two instances before leis in (51) and (52). Céra is found before diobh apparently in both present and past tenses if sentence (56) contains a past-tense usage. Céra diobh é? therefore means “what family does/did he belong to? where is/was he from?” It is unclear why the article an is found in céra diobh é? and not in cé(r) leis é? We may note that it is indeed cér diobh é?, without a, in Standardised Irish. The various forms used in traditional Muskerry Irish are given in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Past</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+leis</td>
<td>cé leis é? or cér leis é?</td>
<td>cé (go) mba leis é?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+diobh</td>
<td>céra diobh é?</td>
<td>céra diobh é?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+noun</td>
<td>céra mac?</td>
<td>(possibly céra mac? too)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are not enough attested examples of cé with the indirect relative form of the copula to be sure of all the possible forms (although forms not attested in the large corpus of Ó Laoghaire’s works
would be extremely rare). Logically, present- and past-tense forms before nouns starting with a vowel would be *cér iníon i? and *cérh iníon i? I couldn’t find out more information on this during a recent trip to Muskerry, as the current native speakers don’t appear to recognise sentences such as *céra mac é? I was told *céra diobh é? would be used instead of this. Forms, such as *cé go mba diobh é?, that might be predicted, don’t appear to exist.

Finally, like *cad, an interrogative clause starting with cé may be governed by a preposition:

64. An t-é a bhionn ag argóint ar cé h-é an naomh is mó nó cé h-é an naomh is ligh. (Aithris ar Chriost, p230)

Ceocu?

Ceocu, “which? which of them?”, is derived from cé acu and pronounced /k′ukə/. Ceocu may be followed by a prepositional pronoun formed from ag or de. Forms such as ceocu agaibh (/k′ukə giv/, “which of you?”; derived from cé acu agaibh) thus contain prepositional pronouns using ag twice. A ceocu noun phrase may be used with a prepositional pronoun and an indirect relative clause as in sentence (66), which means “to which of them does the woman belong?/whose wife is she?” Ceocu may also directly qualify a noun in the capacity of an interrogative adjective, as in (67) below (“which school?”).

65. Ach cé ’cu agaibh Niréos agus ce ’cu agaibh Tirsítés? Ní léir an méid sin fós. (Lúcián, p153)
66. D’a bhí sin, nuair thiócfaidh an aiseirigh, agus nuair a dh’eireóchaíd siad go léir, cé ’cu dhiobh gur leis an bhean? (Na Cheithre Soisgéil, p122)
67. ... feuchaint cé ’cu sgoil a churfadh amach an buachail ab fheár nú an cailín ab fheár. (Sgothbualadh, p119)

Ceocu means “whether” when followed by a direct relative clause:

68. Ní fheadar cé ’cu a dhein nó nár dhein, agus is cuma liom. (Niamh, p335)
69. B’é nídh é sin ’ná cad a bhí imthighthe ar Amhlaibh nó cé ’cu beó nó marbh a bhí sé. (Niamh, p97)

Pé

Pé, “whichever, whoever, whatever”, results from a truncation of *cibé, in itself a historical fusion of cé and the present subjunctive form of the copula. Pé may govern a noun, or may take the copula with the following forms:

70. Dein anois é, dein féin anois, a mhic mo chroidhe, pé rud a dh’fhéadfair a dhéanamh. (Aithris ar Chriost, p49)
71. “Léigh é, pé rud é!” arsa ’n rí. (Mo Ségal Féin, p198)
72. “Ná fhéadfadh an méid sin do rúdh gan duine do mhíleadh led’ chuid glinneamhna, pé h-é thu féin?” (Séadna, p10)
73. Cé h-iad is déanaigh a chaith dhiobh é? Pé h-iad féin is mithid dóibh é. (Cómhairle Ár Leasa, p233)
74. Bhí an ceart aige pé ’r bh’ é féin. (Sgothbualadh, p144)
75. Pé áit as a dtáinig sé, nó pé comhacht a thug ann é, is eagal liom ná hintheóchaídh sé gan dioghbháil a dhéanamh. (Táin Bó Cuailnge ‘na Dhráma, pp59-60)
76. Tá sé imthighthe anois pé duine go mba leis é. (Notes on Irish Words and Usages, p133)
As pé means, not just “whatever”, but “whoever” (as in pé hiaid féin above, equivalent to pé daoine iad féin), logically we might have expected indirect relative forms of the copula similar to those found with cé. Yet I have found no attestation of clauses like *pér leis é (“whoever it belonged to”) or *péra díobh é (“wherever he is from/whatever family he belongs to”). These appear to be replaced by the forms shown in sentences (75) and (76) above.

**Peocu**

The use of ceocu to mean “whether” can be hard to differentiate from peocu, derived from pé acu, pronounced /p‘uku/. Peocu is often followed by a relative clause in a very similar fashion to ceocu. Gerald O’Nolan explained in his Studies in Modern Irish Part I (p76) that ceocu is used with substantival clauses (ní fheadar cia ’cu thiocfaidh sé nó ná tioicfaidh), whereas peocu is used with adverbial clauses (pé ’cu thiocfaidh sé nó ná tioicfaidh, fanfad-sa). Just as with ceocu, peocu may be followed by ag or de (often written do):

77. Pé ’cu chodlas nú nár chodlas ní baoghal gur sgar an sgéal le m’aigne. (Sgothbhualadh, p18)
78. Tá órdú tabhartha ag Méibh dá fearaibh cuidridh má chid siad sa chath me gan me dhul beó as, pé ’cu ag Ultaigh nó ag Fearaibh Éirean a bheidh buadh. (Táin Bo Cuailnge ‘na Dhráma, pp236-237)
79. ... peocu don triúr agaibh is mó a bhualfig bob. (Scéalaiocht Amhlaioibh, p223)

**Cá?**

Cá is a somewhat generic interrogative adjective, meaning “what X?” and “which X?” Its precise meaning is best appraised from context. When used as an interrogative adjective, cá does not eclipse and prefixes h to a vowel where necessary.

80. “Cé h-é thusa, a fhir bhig?” ar seisean, “nó cá tír as a dtánaís?” (Eisirt, p42)
81. Ca bhfios domhsa ceocu Fearghus nó Conchobhar ba mhó a bhí ciontach! (Táin Bó Cuailinge ‘na Dhráma, p104)

We see here that cá tír means “which country?” (equivalent to ceocu tír) and is followed by an indirect relative clause. I haven’t found any examples of such usage by Ó Loingsigh, and such usages are rare in Ua Laoghaire’s works too (and thus maybe not forms found in the colloquial dialect, but rather forms picked up by Ua Laoghaire in his wider reading in Irish). The extended meaning of the frequently encountered phrase ca bhfios is “how would I know?” I include it here in the discussion of the use of cá as a generic interrogative adjective qualifying a noun, but Ua Laoghaire’s frequent use of the spelling ca bh’fhios found elsewhere in his works indicates that he did not believe that in this phrase cá governs a noun as an interrogative adjective with exceptional eclipsis, but rather that the bh derives from a lenited conditional-tense copula. If so, ca here would be an interrogative adverb, “how?” Ca bhfios is frequently found in Ua Laoghaire’s works spelt with a short a, indicating the dialectal pronunciation /kavəs/.

The use of cá háit? to mean “where?” is also an instance of cá as a generic interrogative adjective. I can only identify one use of cá háit in Ua Laoghaire’s works:

82. Ach tá aithne againn air seo, cá dtáinig sè; ach Criost, nuair a thioicfaidh sé, ní h-eól d’aoinne cá h-áit gurab as é. (Na Cheithre Soisgéil, p245; cá dtáinig sè illustrates the fact that in older Muskerry Irish, the verb tigim/tagaim did not take ro in the past tense; this phrase is equivalent in meaning to cár tháinig sè)
Cá huair (also found in Ua Laoghaire’s works as cá uair), “when?”, is used with the copula. Both cá huair and cá uair are exceedingly rare in Ua Laoghaire’s works.

83. Cá huair ba chóir dúinn úrnuithe do rádh? (An Teagasg Críosdaidhe, p23)

The generic nature of cá is shown by the fact that this word, used without a noun, is also an adverb meaning “where?”, followed by eclipsis or n-prefixation of a vowel. In the past tense, cár, which lenites, is found. Cá/cár often has the meaning “where from?”, as well as “where?” We may note in passing Gerald O’Nolan’s explanation that cá derives from an earlier ca with a suffixed preposition an (“where from?”): this accounts for the length of the vowel, but also for the distinctive syntax following cá compared with the other Irish interrogatives (see The New Era Grammar of Modern Irish, p52).

84. Cá mbionn tú nuair ná bionn tú ad’ láthair féin? (Aithris ar Chriost, p69)
85. Cán-imtheóch’sé uatha? (Sgothbhualadh, p6)
86. Do thógadar an Tighearna as an dtuama, agus ní fios dúinn cár chuireadar é. (Na Cheithre Soisgéile, p282)
87. Cár ghlac sé corp agus anam mar atá againne? (Aithris ar Chriost, p13)

Used with the copula, cá, “where?” becomes cár (cárb before a vowel) without lenition in the present tense, and cár (or cárbh before a vowel) with lenition in the past/conditional tense. The spellings cárb ab as mé and càr bh’ as í in (90) and (91) are worthy of note, indicating such forms may produce an epenthetic vowel.

88. B’fhéidir go bhféadfá-sa a dh’innsint dúinn cár ceart dúinn aghaidh a thabhairt anois, nó cad é an treó baill ’n-a mbeadh aon deabhramh go dtiocfaimis suas leis an sgéal. (Guaire, Vol 2, p202)
89. Cár mhaith leat go ndéanfaimís an cháisg d’ollamhú dhuit le caithionn? (Na Cheithre Soisgéil, p75)
90. Tá aithne agaibh orm-sa agus is eol daoibh cár ab as mé; agus ní uaim féin a thánag; ach tá an t-é a chuir uaidh mé fior, agus ní’í aithne agaibh-se air. (Na Cheithre Soisgéil, pp245-246)
91. D’fhiafraigh fear an tíghe dhi cár bh’ as í. (Mo Sgéal Féin, p7)

Cár as tu? is thus similar in meaning to cad as duí? and cad as tu? mentioned above.

Eile may be used with cá in the form cad eile cá+verb. (The example given below illustrates the frequent use of the spelling ca bhfuil in the Irish of both Ua Laoghaire and Ó Loingsigh, which clarifies the short vowel in the pronunciation of this phrase: /kɑ vil/.) I also give an example below of a cá-clause being governed by a preposition.

92. Agus cad eile ca bhfuil oiread oír le fághail agus atá le fághail anso againne? (Lúcián, p57)
93. Ní raibh aon tuairisc sa leabhar, ná ar chúhmhas an leabhair, ar cad é an caisleán é ná ar cá raibh sé. (Mo Sgéal Féin, p101)

We may note in passing that indirect relative usages give in Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla such as cá air, cá leis and cá uaidh are not attested in Muskerry Irish. Finally, use of cá with nouns and adjectives in the meaning of “how much” is discussed in the appropriate section below.

Canad?

Canad?, “where?”, is derived from cá ionad? and is thus technically a use of cá as an interrogative
adjective. *Canad* is relatively rare, but can be seen to suit copula usage and one-word questions particularly well. The use of an appended *isteach* is also found (*canad isteach?*). Whereas Ua Laoghaire has a direct relative clause *canad a chonacthas é* in (95), Ó Loingsigh regularly uses the form *canad ann* followed by an indirect relative.

94. *Agus dubhradar-san: Canad* is toil leat go n-ollamhóchaimís é. (*Na Cheithre Soisgéil*, p210)
95. *Do ghluais Dormfhlaith ar fuid an rightheighlaigh ag ceistiúchán ar na seirbhísigh feuchaint cé ba dhéanaigh a chonactaí an tighearna óg, Amhlaoibh, agus canad a chonacthas é.* (Níamh, p302)
96. *“Ó, chím-se fós iad,” “adeireadh duine. “Canad?” adeireadh duine eile.* (*Eisirt*, p89)
97. *Nuaire a chua sé abhaile ón scuaraíocht ní fheadar sé canad isteach, geall leis, go bhféadadh sé dul sa chuirt álainn go léir a bhí roimis i n-inead an tseana-bhotháin.* (Scéalaiocht Amlaoibh, p50)
98. *Ní fheadar Donacha canad ann ’na raibh an bhean le fáil.* (Scéalaiocht Amlaoibh, p206)

*Eile* may be used with *canad*. The following is the only example I can find:

99. *“Ni hannso do chaithfead mo phroinn amáireach.” “Agus canad eile, a dhe?” arsa Ó Dhomnaill.* (*An Cleasaidhe*, p9)

**Cathain?**

“When?” is normally *cathain* (derived from *cá tan* and thus a use of the generic interrogative as an adjective), pronounced /kəˈhin/’. Spellings *cathain*, *cathoin* and *cathin* are all found in Ua Laoghaire’s works. *Cathain* is followed by a direct relative clause. I can’t find any attestation of *cathain* used with the copula. Compare *cá huair* with the copula in (83) above.

100. *“Airiú, cathain a chonaicís í, a Sheághain?” ar siad.* (*Séadna*, p177)

**Cad fá? and other phrases with cad meaning “why?”**

*Cén fáth* for “why?” is not found in Muskerry Irish. There are a large number of choices here, including *cad fá?*, *cad ’na thaobh* and *cad chuige*. Interestingly, Seosamh Laoide stated that *cad ’na thaobh*, pronounced /κa na ’he:v/, may contain, not *cad*, but *ca*, the original form of the generic interrogative *cá* found in some interrogative phrases (see *Focloir do cuireadh le Fionn & Lorcán*, p116). If so, there is correctly no /d/ in the pronunciation. All three may take an indirect relative clause:

101. *Cad fá go leigimid Sinn féin ar ár ngluighinibh i lathair iomhághtha Chríosd agus na naomh?* (*An Teagasg Criosdaidhe*, p21)
102. *Cad fá an t-eagla so oraibh?* (*Na Cheithre Soisgéil*, p97)
103. *Cad ’na thaobh, d’a bhrihgh sin, ná fuilim níos mó ar lasadh le grádh dhuit, agus mé ad’ láthair?* (*Aithris ar Chríost*, p238)
104. *“Agus cad ’na thaobh an cogadh má ’seadh?” arsa mise.* (Níamh, p222)
105. *Cad chuige go mbrisid do dheisgiobhuil-se nósa na sean?* (*Na Cheithre Soisgéil*, p41)
106. *Cad chuige an bhuaírit agus an gol?* (*Na Cheithre Soisgéil*, p100)

*Cad é an chúis* (an example of a masculine subsujet with a feminine noun), *cad ar a shon* and *cad uime* may also mean “why” or something analogous to it (“for what reason?”, “in relation to what?”), etc) in Ua Laoghaire’s Irish. *Cad ar a shon* and *cad uime* have not been found in Ó Loingsigh’s Irish. *Cad fé ndeár* (or *cad fé ndeara*) is occasionally found with an indirect relative clause, but is more generally followed by a noun subject or a verbal noun. *Cad fé ndeár san?* and
"cad fé ndeár é sin?" are attested (as is cad ‘na thaobh san?), meaning “why is that?” Finally, cad on its own as in (112) can also mean something similar to “why” in an elliptical construction:

107. Bhí fhios agam cad é an chúis n-a mbíodh Caolte ag teacht fé dhéin teighlaigh Thaidhg Mhóir uí Chealla. (Niamh, p188)
108. “Airiú,” ar sise, “cad ar a shon go dtabharfá an oiread san airgid dom roimh ré?” (Séadna, p63)
109. A Dhia, a Dhia, cad uime gur thréigis mé? (Na Cheithre Soisgéil, p83)
110. Ni fheadar an tsaoghal cad fé ndeara do mhnáibh na h-Éirean a leithéid de dháil a bheith acu ann, ní cad fé ndeara dhóibh bheith ‘ghá labhairt le n-a gcéanna. (Sgothbhualadh, p70)
111. A Dhia, a Dhia, cad fé ndeara do mhnáibh na h-Éirean a leithéid de dháil a bheith acu ann, ní cad fé ndeara dhóibh bheith ‘ghá labhairt le n-a gcéanna. (Sgothbhualadh, p70)
112. “Airiú,” arsa Diarmuid, “agus cad ba ghádh an dithneas go léir?” (Séadna, p42)

**Conas?**

Similar conas (from cá ionas and thus a use of the generic interrogative as an adjective) is found in Muskerry in the place of the cad é mar and cé(n) chaoi used elsewhere in Ireland to form the interrogative “how”. Possibly illogically, conas takes a direct relative clause. The conas atá tú? form taught to learners of Irish ignores the fact that the relative particle is not heard and conas 'tánn/taíonn tú? represents the pronunciation better. In The Dialects of Co. Clare, Nils Holmer stated that /kənəs əˈha tə/ was found in Co. Clare when the Gaeltacht survived in that part of Munster (see pp87, 129 in that work); it seems that if the relative particle is clearly heard, the substantive verb should be lenited too. However, Ua Laoghaire does write out the relative particle in conus atáthar in (113); this may be because the autonomous form of the verb is more rarely found than conas 'taíonn tú? Conas is used with the copula in a direct relative construction.

113. “Conus atáthar ag an muintir mhóir mhaith seo indiu?” arsa Guaire. (Guaire, Vol 1, p78)
114. Conus is féidir an t-arán agus an fion d’athrúghadh i bhfuil agus i bhfeóil Criosd? (An Teagasg Criostaidhe, p26)

As well as conas eile, “how else” may also be cad eile conas. As with the other interrogatives, conas may be governed by ar.

115. Cad eile conus fheuchfá ‘n-a súilibh, mara rud é go bhfuilidh siad féin chómh caoch leat? (Lúcián, p115)

Conas san? is a question (or a question with rhetorical exclamatory force), meaning “how come?” Conas é sin? is also found elsewhere in Ua Laoghaire’s works.


The subordinate-clause use of conas mar expresses “how it is that something is”, “how something happened to take place”, with a direct relative clause:

118. Cad é a mhinicighe a dh’airighis conus mar a thuit an fear so le claidheamh. (Aithris ar Chríost, p49)
**Cad é mar?**

*Cád é mar*, while not used in the general interrogative sense of “how?” in Muskerry Irish, may be found in subordinate clauses to express “how it is that something is” in a manner similar to *conas mar*. It takes a direct relative clause.

119. Ó, an t-é go mbéadh ’n-a chroidhe aige an léas is lúgha d’fhion-ghrádh Dé, do chífeadh sé go soiléir cad é mar ná fuil i neithbh saoghalta ar fad ach folamhas. (*Aithris ar Chriost*, p26)

*Cád é mar* may also be used with a noun in an interrogative sentence (“what sort of X are you?”). This is essentially a copular construction.


The use of *cád é mar* in rhetorical flourishes to mean “what a X!” is discussed below.

**“How” in questions of degree**

The generic interrogative *cá* may also express “how” in questions of degree when governing adjectives or nouns. Compare the following:

122. *An fada d’fhian corp Chríosd san uaig?* (An Teagasg Criostaidhe, p16)

123. *Cá fada tar éis deasgabhála Chríosd gur chuir sé an Spioraid Naomh uaidh?* (An Teagasg Criostaidhe, p16)

The use of the interrogative particle *an*, as opposed to interrogative adverbs such as *cá*, is not the focus of this article. However, we note that *an fada* means “how long?” (and also “how far?” in distance) and that the use of *an* as an interrogative appears to be a more natural usage in such questions. *An fada* contrasts in the edition of Uílliam Ua Cathain’s catechism edited by Ua Laoghaire with *cá fada*, also meaning “how long?”, on the same page of the catechism. *An fada* takes a direct relative clause, whereas *cá fada* is used with an indirect relative. This use of *cá* does not occasion consonant mutation, but would prefix *h* to a vowel, as shown in *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla*, which gives *cá hard*. However, no instances of *cá* governing an adjective beginning with a vowel have been located in the Irish of Ua Laoghaire or O’Loingsigh.

*Cá beag* and *cá mór* mean “how little” and “how large”. However, these phrases have extended idiomatic meanings (“how come it’s not enough? isn’t it enough for you?” and “how come it’s excessive? why shouldn’t you?” respectively), as shown in the following examples; Ua Laoghaire’s literal translations given in (124) indicate that he interpreted the generic interrogative as “where?”; not “how?”, but the generic interrogative nature of *cá* means that this distinction is not significant. *Cár beag* shows that the use of *cá* to mean “how” is essentially a copula construction, which can therefore take the past/conditional form of the copula in the form of *cár* (with lenition). I haven’t located any examples of *cá feárr* or *cá miste*.

124. *Cá beag* and *cá mór* are emphatic interrogative forms of *ní beag* and *ní mór*. *Cá beag duit do cheart fhághail? Where is it too little for you to get your right? i.e. is it not enough for you to get your right? Cá mór dom mo cheart féin do bhaint amach? Where is it too much for me to insist on my own right? i.e. must I not insist...? (Notes on Irish Words and Usages, pp146-147)
125. Cár bheag dom chun mé chosg ar iad a dhéanamh an chrích a rug mo bheirt drithár mar gheall ar bheith ag déanamh gniomhartha d’á sord? (Sgéalaidheachta na Macabéach, Vol 2, p222)

The following example from the stories of Ó Loingsigh has cá with the comparative adjective baoithe (/be:hi/):

126. Agus cá baethe dhôsa féinig súd a rá ná d’Fhionn mhac Cumhaill uí Mhuair uí Bhaoisc teacht... (Scéalaíocht Amhlaoibh, p313)

“How many?” is generally found in Muskerry Irish as an mó? However, Ua Laoghaire does occasionally use cá mhéad and cá mhéid (but not nó mhéad), where the generic interrogative governs a noun. I can’t explain the lenition, unless cá mhéid is a truncation of cá a mhéid, where a is a proleptic use of the possessive adjective. Cad é mhéid aimsire in (129), which also contains an unexpressed proleptic possessive, avoids the use of the generic interrogative cá, but is the only identifiable instance of cad é mhéid in Ua Laoghaire’s works.

128. Cá mhéid pearsa i nDia? (An Teagasg Criosdaidhe, p12)
129. Tár éis raínt aimsire bheith caithte agam sa sgoil sin Mhíchíl de Bháil i Maghchromtha, ní cuimhin íom anois i gceart cad é mhéid aimsire, do labhair Micheál de Bháil le m’athair. (Mo Sgéal Féin, p60)

No examples of constructions like cé chomh te have been found in the Irish of Ua Laoghaire or Ó Loingsigh. This construction appears to be an extraneous dialectal form. In Ua Laoghaire’s Irish, the somewhat rare use of cá to govern a noun or adjective in questions of degree is supplemented by the use of cad é with a definite noun (é is used even with a feminine noun, in proleptic anticipation of the response). We note in (130) below that cad é an fhaid is found on the same page of Ua Laoghaire’s catechism as an fada and cá fada. Like an fada, but unlike cá fada, cad é an fhaid is used with the direct relative. Cad é an fhaid aimsire, as shown in (131), is found much more frequently than cá an fheid aimsire. Cad é an méid aimsire with the article is also attested. The use of cad é an t-aos tu?, translated by Ua Laoghaire as “what age are you?”, but much more naturally “how old are you?” in English, replaces the forms cá haois t(h)ú? and cén aois t(h)ú? found in other forms of Irish.

130. Cad é an fhaid d’fhán Criosd ar an dtalamh so tár éis na h-aiseirighe? (An Teagasg Criosdaidhe, p16)
131. Aon duine, a Dhonchadh, go bhfuil an Ghaeluinn ‘na bhéul aige, cad é an fhaid aimsire is dōich leat ba ghádh dhó thabhairt ag foghlaim conus Ghaeluinn do léighe agus do sgrí’? (Sgothbhualadh, p8)
132. “Cad é an méid aimsire a bhéadh uait?” arsa ’n ceann airm. (Séadna, p215)
133. Cad é an t-aos tu? What age are you? (Mion-Chaint, Cuid a II, p33)

Rhetorical “how!” and “what a!”

Cad é is used in rhetorical exclamations followed by an abstract noun with a proleptic possessive particle. We note that these abstract nouns are often feminine, but the subsubject is, nonetheless, é. The form of the abstract nouns varies in Ua Laoghaire’s works. An example of cad é a mhiniceacht is given below, but cad é a mhinicighe and cad é a mhinice are also found elsewhere, as in (118) above. Such rhetorical phrases, essentially interrogative copular sentences, may be used as noun clauses in a longer sentence, as in (135).
134. A Ierúsalem, a Ierúsalem, a mharbhuigheann na fáidhe, agus a ghabhann do chlochaibh ins na daoine a curtar chúghat, cad é a mhiniceacht dob’ áil liom do chlann a bhailiú chugham mar a bhailígheann an chearc a h-áil fè n-a sgiathánaibh, agus nior bh’áil leat! (Na Cheithre Soisgéil, p67)

135. Agus ansan, má bhion an sgéal chómh dona san ag na righthibh is uiriste a thuisgint cad é a olcas a bhíon an sgéal agá ndaoiminbh. (Lúcián, p62)

136. Gan grádh Dé ann ní l aon tairbhe sa ghníomh sofheicse, ach aon rud a deintear le grádh do Dhia, is cuma cad é a luighead ná a shuaraigheacht, tairbhe agus toradh ar fad iseadh é. (Aithris ar Chríost, p25)

There is a difference between questions like cad é an fhaid? in (130) above and rhetorical exclamations such as cad é a luighead! I don’t have an attestation of cad é a fhaid!, but logically this could be used as an exclamation too. Similarly, we saw that cad é an méid was a question; we could expect cad é a mhéid to be an exclamation in appropriate circumstances. Cad é mhéid as a truncation of cad é a mhéid in (129) is also used as a question, but is an example of prolepsis, required by a subsequent relative clause. Given in (137) below is the only example of a rhetorical exclamation I can find with méid (the citation contains a question mark, but the Douay version of Matthew 6:23 is “If then the light that is in thee, be darkness: the darkness itself how great shall it be!”):

137. Agus má’s ionan agus doircheacht an solus atá ionat, cad é méid na doircheachta féin? (Na Cheithre Soisgéil, p15)

Note the following use of cad é with the comprehensive relative particle to form an exclamation (“how many people!”):

138. Cad é a bhfuil de dhaoine d’á gcailleamhaint tré eolus bhaoth an tsaoghail, agus gan puinn suime acu i seirbhís Dé! (Aithris ar Chríost, p8)

This usage appears exceptional, as it is the only instance I can identify of cad é a bhfuil? in Ua Laoghaire’s works. Cad a bhfuil? is the form he generally uses, as shown in (139) and (140). It is possible that the use of the pronoun here reflects syntactical contamination from phrases such as cad é an mhéid daoine a bhí sa tir (found in Seannmóin agus Tri Fichid, Vol 1, p22; this citation appears to contain a typographical error as an mhéid means “the size” as opposed to an méid, “the amount”, unless an mhéid daoine be interpreted as meaning “the size of the population”), or that Ua Laoghaire originally intended to write cad é an m(h)éid before following cad é by a bhfuil de instead.

139. Cad a bhfuil de dhaoine do mealladh, agus gur stracadh anam a’ colainn acu gan choinne! (Aithris ar Chríost, p49)

140. Ó, cad a bhfuil agam ’á fhulang laistigh! (Aithris ar Chríost, p196)

Cad é mar may be used in rhetoric expressions qualifying a noun in a similar fashion to “what a!” in English (“what a world!”). The rhetorical use of cad é mar derives from its use in subordinate clauses (“how it is that something is a certain way”) explained above. Cad é mar may be followed by a direct relative in a rhetoric exclamation that could possibly be translated as “how it seems that...!” in (141), (142) and (143). In (144) the same construction is found with the copula in a rhetorical sentence that could be translated “how right it is to render unto thee praise and thanks on account of these things”.

141. Ó, cad é mar shaoghal! Cad é mar ná fiul ann ar fad ach trioblóid agus mi-fhorteán agus
ceilig namhad ar an uile thaobh. (Aithris ar Chríost, p138)
142. Cad é mar ná tagan aon là breágh! How extraordinary that no fine day comes! (Notes on Irish Words and Usages, p143)
143. Cad é mar atá an fear láidir ar lár! How the strong man is down. A common construction in the mouths of old Irish speakers. It expresses wonder, admiration, astonishment. (Notes on Irish Words and Usages, p143)
144. Cad é mar is ceart moladh agus buidheachas a ghabháil leat mar gheall ar na neithibh seo! (Aithris ar Chríost, p244)

More rarely, cad iad mar can be found in a rhetorical flourish with a plural noun:

145. Féach, a Mháighstir; cad iad mar chlocha agus cad é mar dhéanamh! (Na Cheithre Soisgéilé, p123)

The rhetorical exclamation cad é mar obair is worth mentioning separately. Ua Laoghaire gives his translation of this in (146). In some sentences, such as (147), the meaning tends towards “why on earth would he imagine there was no accuracy or neatness of expression anywhere else, other than where he himself was born and brought up!”

146. Cad é mar obair duit dul, etc. (Sg. III. 280), what sort of conduct was it. This sentence can be past or present according as the sense requires. Cad é mar obair duit é siúd a dhéanamh indé! Cad é mar obair duit bheith ‘ghá dhéanamh san anois! (Notes on Irish Words and Usages, p83)
147. Pé ceart nú pé deise cainnte atá i mbeul cainnteóra i ndúthaigh áirighthe cad é mar obair dó a cheapadh i n-aigne nó fuil ceart nó deise cainnte i n-aon áit eile ach sa n-áit ‘n-ar rugadh agus ‘n-ar tógadh é féin! (Cómhairle Ár Leasa, p229)

One notices however how dependent many of these examples, particular of questions of degree meaning “how” and rhetorical exclamations meaning “how!” and “what a!”, are on the works of Ua Laoghaire. Cad é mar, for example, is not found in what is attested of the Irish of Ó Loingsigh. Ua Laoghaire states in (143) that some of these phrases were common in colloquial Munster Irish. Other interrogative phrases mentioned here as rarely found may have been picked up by Ua Laoghaire elsewhere or in his reading of Irish literature. Aithris ar Chríost, Ua Laoghaire’s translation of Imitatio Christi, is a particularly rich source of such phrases. Without Ua Laoghaire’s works, it would be difficult to say what forms many interrogative sentences would have taken in the Irish used by speakers of traditional Muskerry Irish.

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