

## Constructions with *i bhfuirm*

The use of *i bhfoirm* to mean “in the form of” is given in *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* (FGB). The existence of wider meanings is not indicated in FGB. Dr Seán Ua Súilleabháin of University College Cork tells me that extended uses of the phrase are particularly associated with the Irish of Amhlaoibh Ó Loingsigh. The various meanings of *i bhfoirm*, frequently found in older literature as *i bhfuirm* or even *i bhfuirim*, will be studied here using primary resources of Cork Irish, including the works of Peadar Ua Laoghaire, the stories of Amhlaoibh Ó Loingsigh and the autobiography of Dónall Bán Ó Céileachair.

We may note in passing that *i bhfuirm* is pronounced /ə vir'im'/, but is liable to lose the initial vowel, thus being realised as /vir'im'/. The noun *fuirm* is rarely found in traditional Irish outside of the phrase *i bhfuirm*. Its frequent use in modern Irish (*foirm*, *foirmeacha*) reflects the need to discuss in Irish grammatical (and other) forms in technical contexts, and as such may be considered a direct translation from English. In an extensive corpus of Ua Laoghaire’s Irish of more than 1.5m words (the transcriptions of Ua Laoghaire’s works done by the Royal Irish Academy), *fuirmeacha* is found only twice, both of which are found on the same page of Ua Laoghaire’s Bible stories, one of which is given below.

1. *Do mhínigh sé dhóibh na riaghalta a bhain le seirbhís phoibilidhe an Tighearna agus na fuirmeacha a bhí le leanmhaint ionta. (Sgéalaidheachta as an mBíobla Naomhtha, Vol 2, p98)*

Ua Laoghaire generally uses *i bhfuirm* in the sense given in FGB, to mean “in the form of”. This is the straightforward sense of the phrase.

2. *Do labhair Íosa na neithe seo go léir leis na daoine i bhfuirm soluidí. (Na Cheithre Soisgél, p36)*
3. *Bhí sé 'n-a ghráinnínibh i bhfuirim síl córiándeir. (Sgéalaidheachta as an mBíobla Naomhtha, Vol 2, p36)*
4. *Ach bíodh go dtánadar go minic agus gur sgartáladar an teampul mór agus gur rugadar leó gach aon rud i bhfuirm óir nú airgid gur fhéadadar teacht suas leis ... (Sgéalaidheacht na Macabéach, Vol 1, p10)*

The relevant phrase in sentence (2) translates pretty directly as “in the form of parables”. Sentence (3) is taken from Ua Laoghaire’s account of the appearance of manna from heaven, which, according to him, looked like coriander seeds. “Looked like” is already a slight move in nuance away from the use of *i bhfuirm* to mean “in the form of”; unless Ua Laoghaire believed manna from heaven was coriander seeds, he can only mean that manna looked liked coriander seeds. In (4) we see that *i bhfuirm* is frequently coupled with *gach aon rud*. *Gach aon rud i bhfuirm óir* is “everything resembling gold”, but the phraseology is loose; “everything made of gold” is the intended meaning.

5. *Conus fhéadfadh aoinne a rádh 'ná go mb'fhéidir go raibh rud éigin i bhfuirm fírinne sa sgeul? (Séadna, p121)*
6. *Diúltuigheann sé do gach nídh i bhfuirm uilc. (Aithris ar Chríost, p213)*
7. *... gan aon fhocal choídhche ag teacht as a bhéal i bhfuirim aon mhaoidhimh as a dheaghréithibh féin. (Seanmóin agus Trí Fichid, Vol 2, p119)*

We see in (5) here how the meaning of *i bhfuirm* gradually moves further way from a relation of something’s form. *Rud éigin i bhfuirm fírinne* can be translated into English as “some element of truth”. In (6), *gach nídh i bhfuirm uilc* could possibly be translated “every form of evil”. In (7) *aon*

*fhocal ... i bhfuirim aon mhaoidhimh* could be seen as “a single word ... amounting to any boasting”. However, in an analogous English phrase “not uttering a single word boasting of his good points”, “boasting” is a present participle. If we were attempting to translate such a sentence into Irish, we could be tempted to find a verb phrase—*aon fhocal a mhaífeadh?* (raising the question whether it would be right anthropomorphically to describe a word, rather than the person uttering the word, as “boasting”). *Aon fhocal ... i bhfuirim aon mhaoidhimh* shows a more natural way of wording such a sentence, illustrating the preference for noun phrases in natural Irish idiom.

8. *Do cuireadh tabhairt suas maith ar an gclainn, 'sé sin fé mar a bhí caoi an uair sin ar aon nídh i bhfuirm tabhairt suas do chur ar chlainn i n-Éirinn. (Mo Sgéal Féin, p33)*
9. *Do stad an fhearhainn um thráthnóna, agus do ghlan an spéir, ach bhí an saoghal ar bar' uisge agus bhí tuile ins gach aon rud i bhfuirm abhan. (Ag Séideadh agus ag Ithe, p34)*
10. *... agus gan ar a chumas na h-airm a dhéanamh chómh tiugh agus bhí glaodhach agus ceannach ortha, bhí a leithéid sin d'airc ar gach aon rud i bhfuirm fir chun arm a bheith n-a láimh aige. (Niamh, p164; tiugh here is Ua Laoghaire's spelling of tiubh)*
11. *Bhí an fharaige ciúin agus bhí an oidhche ag imtheacht, agus ní raibh aon rud i bhfuirm námhad 'ghá thaisbeaint féin i n-aon treo baill. (Bricriu, p72)*
12. *Mharbhuidhar an uile rud i bhfuirm duine de shliocht Gaodhal d'ár fhéadadar teacht suas leis. (Sgothbhualadh, p54)*

A slight development of the nuance in (8) allows us to translate *aon nídh i bhfuirm tabhairt suas* as “any kind of upbringing/education” or “anything in the way of a decent education”. Sentence (9) is a little more awkward: either something is a river or it isn't. Why would we talk of “everything in the form of a river”? We may see a functional equivalent of the English word “whatsoever” in the phrase *gach aon rud i bhfuirm abhan*: “every river whatsoever”.

Sentences (10) and (11) are particularly interesting, showing the use of *gach aon rud* with *i bhfuirm* to describe human beings, even though people are not *rudai*. *Gach aon rud i bhfuirm fir* means “every person whatsoever” and *ní raibh aon rud i bhfuirm námhad* means “there was no enemy whatsoever”. A similar use of *an uile rud* with *i bhfuirm* is shown in sentence (12). The meaning of *i bhfuirm* has shifted a long way from the core meaning of “in the form of”. Yet it seems unlikely that many learners of Irish, translating from English into Irish with the aid of dictionaries, would veer from choices such as *gach aon duine, ní raibh duine ar bith ann* and such phrases.

13. *Má gheibhtear tusa annso, créachtach cró-línteach mar ataoi, beidh a bhfearg níos treise ná a n-oineach, agus ní'l Cú Chulainn i bhfuirim cheart anois chun lucht feirge do fhríoth-álamh mar is cóir. (Táin Bó Cuailnge, p191)*
14. *Bhíodar tar éis an lae chaitheamh amuich 'sa chluiche-mhaigh, ag déanamh taitheige ar chleasaibh lúth agus ar chleasaibh gaile agus gaisge; agus bhíodar suaithte go maith, i dtreo go rabhadar go léir i bhfonn agus i bhfuirm chun an bhídh agus chun na dighe a bhí ollamh ag Conchubhar dóibh. (Bricriu, p80)*

In sentence (13) *i bhfuirim cheart (chun rud a dhéanamh)* means “in the right state to do something”. This may be a variant of *bheith i bhfoirm le rud a dhéanamh* given in FGB, which is clumsily translated there as “to be in form to do sth”, an English-language phrase I have never come across and that is not given in the Oxford English Dictionary. *I bhfonn agus i bhfuirm chun* in (14) may be understood as “desirous of and ready for”.

It can be seen that all of Ua Laoghaire's published uses of *i bhfuirm* fall within the range of meanings indicated in FGB. Similar usages are also frequently found in the autobiography of Donall Bán Ó Céileachair and the stories of Amhlaoibh Ó Loingsigh. I will cite just the following example from Ó Loingsigh to illustrate uses within the normal range of meanings because, apart

from *i bhfuirm bhuimpéise stoca* in Ua Laoghaire's *Séadna* (p178 and elsewhere; I wonder whether such choice of lenition is influenced by the *v* of the English word "vamp"), it is the only one I can find where *i bhfuirm* causes lenition of the following noun:

15. *An Bheachair, rud i bhfuirm chruiceog bheach.* (*Seanachas Amhlaoibh*, p360)

I would like here to discuss usages found in the Irish of Ó Loingsigh and Ó Céileachair where *i bhfuirm* adopts an adverbial meaning not found in Ua Laoghaire's works or in dictionaries.

16. *Tá sí seo i bhfuirm maith mo dhóthain-se.* (*Scéalaíocht Amhlaoibh*, p53)

17. *Chuireadar i bhfuirm speic chainte ar a chéile.* (*Scéalaíocht Amhlaoibh*, p24)

18. *Leis sin do léim Cos 'na shuí, agus i bhfuirm meisce chollata air.* (*Scéalaíocht Amhlaoibh*, p120)

19. *Ní raibh éinne roimis istig ach bean, bean i bhfuirm i meán-aois.* (*Scéalaíocht Amhlaoibh*, p216)

20. *Thugadar roint laethanta mar seo a' cuardach, agus nuair a chidís duine ag amhrán do raighfí féna dhéin, i bhfuirm "Níl éinni a' déanamh buartha dho san." Do neósfadh sé cad a bhí a' déanamh buartha dho.* (*Scéalaíocht Amhlaoibh*, p165)

21. *Do choinibh sé ansan iad ar feag seachtaine, agus níor íneadar i gceart dó conas a thánadar ar iad do mharú, ach i bhfuirm gur le saghas gaisce a mharáodar iad.* (*Scéalaíocht Amhlaoibh*, p172)

In all of these examples, *i bhfuirm* becomes harder to translate into English. We can think of phrases such as "kind of", "sort of", "apparently" and "something like". *Tá sí seo i bhfuirm maith mo dhóthain-se*: "it seems to be enough for me; it'll probably be enough for me; it looks like it'll be more or less enough". *Chuireadar i bhfuirm speic chainte ar a chéile*: "they kind of struck up conversation with each other". *I bhfuirm meisce chollata air*: "it seemed he was still in a daze, having just got up". *Bean i bhfuirm i meán-aois*: "a woman around middle age or who appeared to be middle-aged". *Do raighfí féna dhéin, i bhfuirm "Níl éinni a' déanamh buartha dho san"*: "people went up to him as if to say 'there's nothing troubling him'". *I bhfuirm gur le saghas gaisce a mharáodar iad*: "something along the lines that they killed them in some kind of battle/feat of arms".

*'Bhfuirm* sometimes becomes a verbal mannerism, a "filler word", used while the speaker assembles the rest of the thought, as in (22) below. Sentence (23) shows that this adverbial *i bhfuirm* does not govern the following noun in the genitive (we read *dothal*, not *dothail*; this is the word normally spelt *doichead*), as it is essentially parenthetical:

22. *Ba ghairid chun gur briseag iad, agus bhíodar i mbotháinín ar thaobh bóthair agus gan aon bhlúire acu ach, 'bhfuirm, béile na hoíche.* (*Scéalaíocht Amhlaoibh*, p257)

23. *Is amhlaig a bhí i bhfuirm dothal acu roimpi, agus ba chuma leis a' gcailín beag nuair is go bhfuair sí radharc ar aon tig, agus bheith istig ón oíche.* (*Scéalaíocht Amhlaoibh*, p301)

The following examples from Ó Loingsigh contain a slightly different use of *i bhfuirm*:

24. *Ní claiómh a riug sé leis i n-aochor ach seana-bharra muar iarainn a bhíodh ages na hathaig, i bhfuirm á chathamh, nú i bhfuirm chun saghas éigint cleas nú clis a dhéanamh leis.* (*Scéalaíocht Amhlaoibh*, p9)

25. *Do dhineadar fé dhéin na bhFlathas agus Liam 'na ndiaig, i bhfuirm á gcomáint roimis amach, agus nuair a thánadar go geata d'fhiafraíog cé bhí anso airís.* (*Scéalaíocht Amhlaoibh*, p69)

26. *'Ní íosfar go fóill sinn,' aduairt sé. Do riug sé ar an té ba mhó ceann acu agus ba chaoile*

*cosa, agus do thosnaig ar bheith a' pléascadh na coda eile chun go raibh pé méid acu a bhí ann marbh aige, ach éinne amháin a bhí dultha anáirde ar na frathacha, i bhfuirm 'gcóir ná marófi é féin. (Trí Scéal ó Mhúscraighe, p116)*

27. *Do fuarag na deich píunt aige agus an Giúdaíoch go stracaithe géarrtha, i bhfuirm mar a bheadh gofa air. (Scéalaíocht Amhlaoibh, p51)*

In these sentences, *i bhfuirm* fortifies other phrases to show purpose or effect. *Barra iarainn i bhfuirm á chathamh* in (24) could be translated here as “an iron bar, such as could be thrown”. We could translate the next sentence “an iron bar you could play some kind of trick with”. In (25) *i bhfuirm á gcomáint roimis amach* means “like he was driving them before him” (<“kind of driving them before him”). *I bhfuirm 'gcóir ná marófi é féin*: “so he wouldn't be killed”. In (27), *i bhfuirm* with *mar* takes on the meaning “as if; just like”.

*I bhfuirm* with *mar* is also found in (28) below, cited from Ó Céileachair's autobiography:

28. *Do thosnódh sí uaireanta sara mbeadh an oídhche tuitithe i n-aon chor, agus sé an rud a bhíodh aici á rádh, “hé pí-ú,” i bhfuirm mar a bheadh sí ag glaodhach ar dhuine éigin. (Sgéal mo Bheatha, p144)*

Sentence (28) is the only example of the extended use of *i bhfuirm* I have found outside of the Irish of Ó Loingsigh. Phrases such as *i bhfuirm mar a bheadh sí ag glaodhach ar dhuine* cannot be understood with reference to Standardised dictionaries or the written Irish of Peadar Ua Laoghaire.

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