

Existentials or 'I think therefore I am'

This is where you either start to love or hate the word **ann**. Existentials is a fancy word for "expressions that talk about the existence of things" although the use of **ann** goes a bit beyond that as we will see. And before we start, it is the "same" **ann** as the preposition **in**, only with a somewhat different function.

Let's start with the easy bit first. **Ann** is used in Gaelic to express the notion of something existing (or not, as the case may be):

tha mi ann	1. I exist 2. I am there/here
a bheil Dia ann?	1. Does God exist? 2. Is there a god?
chan eil taibhsean ann	1. Ghosts do not exist. 2. There are no ghosts.
'se a tha ann ...	Fact is ...
ann bho shean	in existence of old
an tu a th' ann?	is it you?
airgead ann no ás	money or no money

As you can see, there is more than one way to translate some of the above Gaelic statements - in Gaelic the exact connotation has to be inferred from context, which isn't much of a problem if you think about it. **Thuirte Descartes "Tha smuaint annam is mar sin tha mi ann"** can't really mean anything but Descartes said "I think therefore I am" ... unless it's a novel in which Descartes is telling someone he is present of course. And in any case, there isn't much of a difference between **Does God exist?** and **Is there a god?** to be honest.

Not that difficult so far. But **ann** also has another function which is a bit harder to pin down. In general terms it can be said to have an emphasising force. Let's look at some examples so you will know what I'm talking about:

rinn mi ann e!	I've already done it!
cha bhi e a' sabaid ann.	He will not be fighting at all.
chan eil aithne aca air an té ann.	They don't know her at all.
an t-amadan a tha thu ann!	Fool that you are!
tha taibhse anns an taigh ann!	There is a ghost in that house!

As you can see, although Gaelic uses the same construction in all the above examples, there are a number of different constructions we have to use in English.

The easiest way to deal with them is perhaps to translate the "extra" **ann** with **it-exists** and then see what is the most logical interpretation. No, I'm not running out of ideas - there are a number of things in Gaelic which just juxtapose two concepts and leave it to the listener to figure the most logical connection - think of construction like **bhàsaich m' athair 's mi 'nam bhalach òg**. **Ann** is best treated as emphasising the existence (or non-existence) of something or somebody.

So the first example would be **did I it-exists it** - what I did really exists > I really did it. The second one would be **not will-be he fighting it-exists** - his fighting will not exist > he will not fight at all and **be ghost in the house it-exists** > a ghost does exist in that house.

This also explains the subtle difference between the following pairs of sentences:

tha cù fon bhòrd	there is a dog under the table
tha cù ann fon bhòrd	there is a dog under the table
tha eàrlas £50 anns a' phàipear	there is a £50 voucher in the paper
tha eàrlas £50 anns a' phàipear ann	there is a £50 voucher in the paper

While the first variant of these Gaelic sentences simply makes a "neutral" statement about the existence of item X, the second variant emphasises the existence of item X, perhaps in response to someone doubting the fact or to express surprise that the fact. Possible scenarios would be the following:

'Aladasair, bheil fhios a'd dè thachair rium an-diugh? Cheannaich mi am Pàipear Beag agus bha eàrlas £50 anns a' phàipear ann!

Bha mi aig Caisteal Urchadain sa mhadainn agus abair iontas a bh' orm nuair a chunna mi an t-uilebheist air a' chladach! Cha robh mi a' creidsinn ann roimhe ach thà uilebheist anns an loch ann!

There is another construction which is connected to this use of **ann** for existentials. Most of you will be familiar with the constructions **se X a tha annam** and **tha mi 'nam X** - but you may not be aware of the subtle difference between them as most grammars tend to sidestep this issue.

The difference is one of disposition/inherent attribute and non-permanence. In less fancy terms, the first is "permanent" and the second "transient". Let's look at some examples:

tha i 'na draibhear bus	she is a bus driver
'se banaltram a tha innte	she is a nurse
tha e 'na oileanach	he is a student
'se oileanach a tha ann	he is a student
tha e 'na bhalach beag	he is a little boy
'se balach beag a tha ann	he is a little boy

Didn't I say something about a difference? There is, but it's difficult to literally translate into English. It is best seen when you use the phrases above together (at least the first two):

tha i 'na draibhear bus an-dràsda ach 'se banaltram a tha innte she is a bus driver now but she really is a nurse
tha e 'na oileanach ach chan e oileanach a tha ann he is a student but he isn't a student.

The first sentence implies that Mrs X trained as a nurse and really want to be one but because the hospital closed, she's temporarily working as a bus driver.

Our student is enrolled at university and thus technically speaking a student, but isn't much of a scholar because he's as thick as two short planks and never goes to lectures.

If you think of **ann** in these examples stressing the existence, it kind of makes sense - '**se oileanach a tha ann** = be-he student that be exist - where you are essentially making a statement about existence twice!

Let's hope you are the latter!! ☺