

Adding Emphasis

Native speakers of most non-Celtic European languages often find it difficult to switch over to the system used in Cornish to emphasise a specific word or phrase within a sentence. In English, we emphasise something simply by saying it more loudly and with a higher pitch. Some learners carry this pattern over when they speak Cornish, but this is not really how native speakers of Cornish spoke and wrote their language. Like Welsh and Breton, Cornish has a very different way of expressing emphasis.

There are basically two ways to emphasise a word or phrase in Cornish:

1. Move the item you want to stress to the beginning of the sentence and
2. If you want to stress a pronoun, add an *enclitic* (see *Nebes Geryow 02*) to the word following it

Let's tackle the two possibilities in order.

1. If possible, try fronting the most important part of the sentence.

Cornish word order is much freer than what native speakers of English are used to. English sentences follow a strict order of **Subject** before **Verb** before **Object (SVO)**. Adverbial phrases describing the circumstances may be added just about anywhere: before the subject, after the object, or somewhere in the middle of the sentence:

Every morning	I	read	the newspaper.
ADV. PHRASE	SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT

Now if we want to emphasise any part of this, we just stress it and can rely on listeners' understanding that the loudest part of the sentence is the one we want to mark as the most important. If we want to indicate this in writing, we run into problems, and have to CAPITALISE (like those annoying people on the internet who always SHOUT at you), set words in **bold** type, add **asterisks** around the emphasised words, and so forth. If I apply this to my sample sentence to make it clear that it is damn well important that I read the damn paper every single morning, I may want to write:

EVERY MORNING I read the newspaper.

- or -

Every morning I read the newspaper.

- or even -

Every morning I read the newspaper.

All in all, not too elegant.

Cornish, on the other hand, allows us to add emphasis unambiguously, in a way that is immediately apparent in writing, but without fiddling around with CAPS LOCK, **boldface**, or punctuation marks. You simply move the part of the sentence you want to emphasise to the front and re-arrange the rest of the sentence accordingly. (This last part can be a bit problematic if you're new to the language, since it may mean that you have to change the form of the verb even though the subject stays the same!)

Consider the following examples:

Pub myttin | y redyav | an paper-nowodhow. = I read the paper *every morning*.
ADV. PHRASE VERB OBJECT

Pub myttin | my | a red | an paper-nowodhow. = ditto
ADV. PHRASE SUBJECT VERB OBJECT

An paper-nowodhow | a redyav | pub myttin. = I read *the paper* every morning.
OBJECT VERB ADV. PHRASE

My | a red | an paper-nowodhow | pub myttin. = *I* read the paper every morning.
SUBJECT VERB OBJECT ADV. PHRASE

As you can see, this flexibility of word order allows Cornish speakers to convey a whole lot of nuances which aren't easy to convey in English without resorting to changes in layout. However, this also means that in order to speak perfectly idiomatic Cornish, you should try to differentiate and emphasise different parts of the sentence according to the context in which you are using it.

If you are asked something, the requested information is the most important part of your answer and should go at the beginning of the sentence if possible. In other words, if the question asks "Who?" your answer should start with a person's name; if the question asks "Where?" your answer should start with a place; and if a question asks "When?" your answer should start with a date or a time:

Ple'ma dha gath? = Where is your (sg.) cat?
Y'n gegin yma. = It's *in the kitchen*, lit. "In the kitchen it-is."
 (The information that has been requested goes first.)

Piw os ta? = Who are you (sg.)?
Tommas ov vy. = I am *Thomas*, lit. "Thomas am-I I".
 (Again, the name 'Thomas' is what's been requested, so it goes first.)

It is also possible to just say:

Tommas ov. = I am *Thomas*., lit. "Thomas am-I."

2. If you want to stress a pronoun or a subject expressed by the form of the verb, add an enclitic!

Cornish, unlike English, allows you to leave out the subject pronoun (**my**, **ty**, **ev**, **hi**, etc.) if it is already indicated by the form of the verb. Thus, we can think of **ov** as the equivalent of English "I am", not just "am". Native speakers of English often find this counter-intuitive and tend to want to add a pronoun in Revived Cornish even though this is unnecessary. In Middle Cornish, adding **vy** after **ov** meant that the speaker was emphasising the subject, since the subject is already included in the verb form. In Late Cornish, however, as verb endings fell together and it became impossible to determine the subject from the form of the verb alone, the enclitic¹ pronouns became generalised:

¹ *Enclitics*, as you may remember from *Nebes Geryow 02*, are unstressed structure words which you add after another word in order to nuance its meaning.

Middle Cornish:

Yth esov (vy).... = I am (*I*)....

Late Cornish:

Th ero'vy.... = I am....

Table 1: Enclitic Pronouns

-vy I	-ni we
-jy you (sg.)	-hwi you (pl. or polite)
-ev (m.) he -hi (f.) she	-i they

While the original difference in emphasis between the sentences **Tommas ov** (“I am *Thomas*”) and **Tommas ov vy** (“*I* am *Thomas*”) has largely been lost in present-day Cornish, it is worth remembering that Middle Cornish did make this distinction—and it is a useful distinction to make. So if you model your Cornish on the Middle Cornish period, you may want to leave off the **vy** in sentences like **Tommas ov vy**, unless you mean to emphasise the subject.

The generalisation (and consequent weakening) of personal pronouns was foreshadowed early by the appearance of reduplicated, decidedly emphatic versions of personal pronouns like **-evy**, **-tejy**, **-eev**, and so on—a strong indication that present-day Cornish mirrors a historical development which was already noticeable in Middle Cornish:

Table 2: Reduplicated Enclitic Pronouns

-evy *I*	-nyni *we*
-tejy *you* (sg.)	-hwyhwi *you* (pl. or polite)
-eev (m.) *he* -hyhi (f.) *she*	-ynsi *they*

Something similar happens in phrases involving possessive pronouns (**ow**, **dha**, **y**, etc.), since we can add emphasis to the pronoun by placing an extra enclitic pronoun at the end of the phrase. For example, Middle Cornish had two ways of saying “my father”:

ow thas = my father
ow thas vy = *my* father, lit. “my father-me”

Again, if you apply English patterns to your Cornish, you may tend to express “*my* father” by saying **OW thas**, putting audible stress on the **ow**. While you will be understood – after all, all speakers of present day Cornish know English and its way of emphasising words well – this is not the way native speakers of a Celtic language would normally do it. They’d simply add an enclitic pronoun (**vy**, **jy**...) without changing the overall stress pattern of the phrase very much. (In fact, as a general rule, possessive pronouns like **ow**, **dha**, and **y** should never receive a strong stress. We can tell that they were generally unstressed in Middle Cornish because these pronouns tended to be reduced to schwa or disappear completely in Late Cornish.)

As in the case of the enclitic emphasising the subject of a conjugated verb (see above), Late Cornish generalised the use of enclitic pronouns when marking possession until they replaced the older possessive pronouns entirely. Speakers of 18th-century Cornish would simply say **an tas vy**, lit. “the father of me,” rather than **ow thas** or **ow thas vy**. (Actually, they would most likely also replace the word for “father” with **sira**, “sire” and say **an sira vy**. But that is a different question entirely, one of *semantic change*.)

Prepositional pronouns (or conjugated prepositions) also have emphatic versions which are constructed along similar lines. Their use is exemplified in the following sample dialogue:

A: Oll an gwella dhis. = All the best to you.
B: Ha dhiso-jy ynwedh! = And *to you (sg.)*, too!

Here we have a contrast between unmarked **dhis** and emphatic **dhiso-jy**, with the latter featuring the enclitic pronoun **-jy**.

We have now covered how best to reply to a question. But what if you just want to make a simple statement that introduces a new topic, and isn't answering a question? Again, the most relevant information goes first:

Skwith ov. = I am *tired*. (To make sure everybody knows how you are feeling.)
My yw skwith. = *I* am tired. (...but perhaps other people aren't.)
Lemmyn yth ov skwith. = *Now* I am tired. (...but half an hour ago, you weren't.)

To add additional emphasis, you could say:

Skwith ov vy. = *I* am *tired*.
Lemmyn yth ov vy skwith. = *Now* *I* am tired.

Just keep in mind that this second way of nuancing emphasis (using enclitic pronouns) isn't very common among learners of present day Cornish, many of whom like to use the enclitic pronouns whenever possible. Emphasis by fronting the most relevant item, however, is still very much in common use, and is probably something you will want to imitate.

It may take a while to get used to this system because it actually requires you to think in Cornish instead of just translating an English sentence you have formed in your mind beforehand. But try to make these distinctions whenever you think of them, and you'll soon see that you are developing an intuition for which item to place first in a Cornish sentence!