# Proceedings of the Thurneysen Fanclub: issue 11

Records of the discussions in the conference room on 16-02-2017

In attendance: David Stifter (chair), Siobhán Barrett, Michelle Doran, Bernhard Bauer (scroller), Elliott Lash,[1] Fangzhe Qiu, Lars Nooij (scribe)
Apologies: Anne Harrington, Deborah Hayden, Chantal Kobel, Lára Ní Mhaoláin, Brian Ó Catháin

**Practicalities**
Bernhard brought in some "alternative cookies"; his generosity is hereby commended.

In relation to the department's research seminar later this afternoon it is mentioned that there will be "better food" there this season. That is to say, sausages will be served alongside the cheese and crackers. Whether this at all warrants the use of the word "better" is a matter which gained some attention in the original, handwritten minutes of the meeting, if not in the actual discussion. Let us merely note that – for the present, at least – *this* fanclub remains gloriously meat-free.[2]

**Matters arising**
In relation to the proceedings of the previous meeting Elliott comments that there is another example of <h> apparently being used to write /χ/. This is found in the Inchagoill inscription (Co. Galway, CIIC 1) in Roman script: *lie luguaedon macci menueh*. It is noted. H, in various functions, is not uncommon in Old British inscriptions in Roman script (see, e.g., ch. 42, 44 etc. of Sims-Williams's *Celtic Inscriptions*). It also occurs in Pictish *Nehhton* (Lunnasting inscr., Ogam).

**Use of the accent (§26)**
It should be stated explicitly that accents are often not found at all and that vowel length is therefore often left unmarked in the manuscripts. It should also be added that accents are often not placed over the long vowel itself, but e.g. over surrounding consonants.

In a related matter, touched upon during last week's meeting, it is again noted that accents are also used for purely scribal purposes to mark the use of the vernacular in (glosses on) Latin texts. Although this is not a matter of orthography as such, but more of textual arrangement, it should still be commented upon. Changes in this practice have at times been linked to matters of dating (e.g. the use of ´ versus ¯ ).[3] Brief mention is again made of British parallels.

"In the present work the diphthongs with *-i* are printed *aí oí uí* in order to distinguish them from *ā ō ū* followed by the glide *i*…"; it seems rather abrupt to switch from the description of scribal practices to a question of normalisation all at once. We maintain that such matters should be discussed in separate sections of the grammar.

It is also suggested to adopt the now more common practice of writing e.g. *áe* before a non-palatal consonant and *aí* before a palatal consonant. This leads to a discussion of some remaining inconsistencies in normalisation practices. For example, David would usually write *cía* 'who', but would normally write *dia·n-* without an accent (in a sense due to a lingering uncertainty in the latter case: etymologically one expects hiatus, but this is not found in, for example, the Poems of Blathmac – adding neither an accent, nor a hiatus marker thus allows one to refrain from taking a definitive position on the issue). The general principles to this practice would appear to be that pretonic elements are not marked with

[1] Elliott came in wearing very colourful, new glosses, which certainly merit a footnote. [DS: Glosses? After only a few months work on Old Irish you are already so fixated on glosses?]
[2] Ex post note: due to a temporary shortage in one of the University's restaurant, no sausages could be served in the evening. But big meat promise for the next two research seminars!
[3] Elliott brings up an example of the matter from the Book of Armagh on his laptop; people bend over (and don't actually see anything).

an accent (including pretonic *cia*), whereas stressed elements are. Moreover, whether or not the diphthong is etymologically expected may also serve as a criterium for adding an accent to it. To some extent such inconsistencies of orthography are unavoidable.

The question is raised whether David would add a trema over the first or the second vowel when marking hiatus (e.g. should one write a hypothetical *dïa* or *diä*). In general, David would place it over the second vowel, unless the first vowel is an *i*, simply for the aesthetic reason of not having three dots in a row. Moreover, he – as a German speaker – finds that *ä* puts him strongly in mind of the German umlaut. However, the consensus is that consistency is to be preferred and that it would be best to put the trema on the second vowel. This brings the normalisation of OIr. nicely in line with the practices of Dutch and the unusual English orthography of *The New Yorker*.[4]

In cases where a long vowel co-occurs[5] with hiatus both should be marked: e.g. *suäĺaig* 'virtue' and *diäd́irim* 'countless'.[6] It is noted in passing that Thurneysen rightly translates *druí* as 'magician', rather than 'druid'.

"In general, marks of length omitted in the MSS. are inserted…"; it seems odd that this note on the normalisation practices is given as an endnote, rather than being included in the main text of the paragraph, given that the paragraph mainly deals with such matters. We wonder why Thurneysen decided against using a macron to indicate vowel length left unmarked in the sources (as opposed to an acute accent), which was his standard practice in his textual editions (e.g. *Scéla Muicce Maic Dá Thó*).

In general, there are three different ways of rendering manuscript readings in edition. Taking the word to the right as an example, it can be approximated in the following ways:

1. sin
2. si*n*
3. s$\bar{\text{i}}$[7]

The first and second ways are traditional; the first giving just the word itself and the second adding the extra information that the *-n* was abbreviated in the manuscript. The third and most recent option is to give a fairly close approximation of the manuscript form, showing the placement of the abbreviation stroke, as well as the fact that the *i* was written subscript. It is agreed that the second option would generally be preferred for citing forms in a grammar, whereas the third might be of use specifically in the sections on letters and orthography (but would otherwise simply provide too much information for our purposes). This also allows one to use a macron to indicate vowel length not marked in the manuscript, which would otherwise be reserved for the abbreviation stroke if the third way were adopted.

"It is unlikely that the later pronunciation *eó*, with the stress on the *o*, had developed in the O.Ir. period."; why discuss this here? Does it even relate to OIr. itself? We should drop this remark.

**Use of double vowels to mark vowel length (§27)**
In general, this paragraph would benefit from a quantitative approach, tracking this particular usage over time.[8]

---

[4] There was speculation that the trema/diaeresis as a hiatus marker in The New Yorker could be a Dutch substratum of Nieuw Amsterdam. More on this fascinating topic at http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-curse-of-the-diaeresis (link provided by Elliott).
[5] Or: *coöccurs*, or *cooccurs*.
[6] At this point, the ritual thanksgiving to Unicode is due for all the things that are today possible with computer fonts. All ye young fellas who grew up with a 64K character set, you have no idea how nerve racking the limitations of 128 or 256 characters used to be for historical linguists.
[7] See footnote 6.
[8] Some work on this has been done by Lian Blasse in her RMA-thesis: Method in the Madness (Universiteit Utrecht 2015), esp. pp. 22-37.

It should be stated that doubling of vowels may be combined with the accent to mark vowel length.

Alongside the sources mentioned by Thurneysen, doubling is also found in the *Stowe Missal* (*clii* and *intii*), in Blathmac (*hiic* and *hiich* [MS *hiic*], the latter monosyllabic, despite having a historical hiatus) and in *Críth Gablach* (*ríi*). These latter sources combine to give us the impression that the doubling may be particularly frequent with *ii*.

Cross-references should be made to the orthography of palatalization.

"In Wb. also…"; we have a discussion on the appropriate use of *also* in English, which centres on the placement of *also* in this particular sentence. It seems awkward to some, unusual, but not ungrammatical to others and completely ordinary to the remainder. Elliott discusses the merits of regarding it as a sentence modifier, rather than a constituent modifier. At any rate, it is decided that we should drop this *also*, as it appears to put Würzburg on a pedestal. Nonetheless, we would still most likely discuss Würzburg on its own as it offers a relatively large amount of examples of doubling.[9]

"In Wb. also doubling is frequent, but – except in compensatorily lengthened *ē* (§54) – is restricted to long final syllables…"; we are not certain whether this is the case. And as Thurneysen references ahead to paragraph §54 at this stage, we also take a look at this particular paragraph.[10] It is striking that – apart from *indocbáal*, the vowel of which is lengthened through compensatory lengthening – most of the words in §27 are monosyllabic. This may be a relevant feature.

"This restriction shows that doubling is intended to express something more than mere length, perhaps a pronunciation bordering on disyllabic in certain positions of the word in its clause or in slow speech." There are multiple issues with this statement. What do "bordering on disyllabic" and "certain positions" mean exactly? Did Thurneysen consider vowel doubling so exceptional as to warrant a rather vague *ad hoc* explanation? Or did he, perhaps, by means of a rather esoteric statement attempt to get at the matter that a syllable may have multiple *morae* and that this may be the case here? As to the "slow speech", did he – perhaps – think of Avestan, where it is known that priests would mumble the – by then fossilized language – particularly slowly and solemnly, overstressing some features of the pronunciation? Elliott also suggests that one might want to check whether the positions of the word in its clause are at all similar to the variant pausal forms of words in different clausal positions in Hebrew.

"Words in which vowels formerly constituting two syllables have become monosyllabic by contraction…"; does Thurneysen here refer to hiatus being lost? If so, we might as well call it that. The issue is raised that it would be beneficial if in a modern grammar a section on the phonology (using IPA) preceded the section on orthography. There are issues with the examples cited by Thurneysen: in *tintuuth* neither hiatus, nor a long vowel is expected. In the additional example in the *Handbuch* (*aisn̓díis* < **as·ndeu̯e̯i̯d-ti̯i̯ū*) hiatus is not expected, although the long vowel is. Perhaps he never intended this to be about hiatus, but about words which etymologically had an extra syllable? Might he be discussing secondary diphthongs rather than hiatus? At any rate, these are the exceptions to what is in effect a marginal aspect of OIr. orthography.

"In verse monosyllables with a long vowel or a diphthong at the end of a line sometimes count as two syllables." Why mention this here since this seems top be a particular feature of poetic style? We know of examples in the *Annals of Ulster*, the *Gospel of Thomas* and *Blathmac's Poems*, where *Día* 'God' and *ciä* 'mist' are counted as two syllables (neither of which should be disyllabic).

---

[9] At this point David offers the following principle: "Always be as specific as possible, otherwise there will be someone who misunderstands you." Originally nicer phrased as a variant of Murphy's Law (*Cáin Murchada*) at https://twitter.com/ChronHib/status/822391772579905538.

[10] David: "What strikes you immediately?" Elliott: "It is not presented alphabetically and there are no citations." David: "That is too pedantic…"

Before moving on to the next paragraph, Michelle suggests that Thurneysen might have discussed the orthography ahead of the phonology because he wished to discuss the phonology by means of a standardised orthography? This might well be the case. At any rate, we would prefer to start with the phonemes of the language, before determining how these phonemes were variously spelled at the time.

**(Voiceless) spirants (§28)**

"For the **spirants** (or fricatives) Latin offered only five symbols: *s, f,* and in Greek words *ch th ph*, all of which are used in Irish." Whilst correct for *s* and *f*, the values of the combinations *ch, th* and *ph* are less straightforward. These latter three stand for Greek *χ, θ* and *φ*, which in Homeric Greek represented a highly aspirated $k^h$, $t^h$ and $p^{(f)h}$, but in Koiné Greek represented /χ/, /þ/ and /f/. However, it is clear that most Latin-speakers were entirely unable to pronounce the first two of these later phonemes. And, indeed, in Latin inscriptions often spellings with *c* and *t* as variants of *ch* and *th* are found for these words, indicating that they pronounced them /k/, /t/. Early medieval Irish learners of Latin may therefore well have been taught that there were two ways of writing /k/ and /t/: namely *c*, *ch* and *t, th* – knowing which to use in what words would have been part of the learned quality (or 'coolness-factor') of a scholar. On the basis of this, McCone has argued that the singular Cambray example of *ch* for /g/ indicates that they originally merely knew that the *-h* somehow modified the preceding *c*, but that they did not know what sound was intended – thus making it fitting to render either of the initial mutations. He concluded that it is a mere coincidence that *ch* and *th* later occur with values similar to their Koiné counterparts.

However, is this really the case? It may well be that some learned tradition preserved their Koiné pronunciation in the West. It may, perhaps, be significant that *ch* and *th* are quite consistently used for /χ/ and /þ/ in Old Welsh as well, and the digraphs also occur on stone inscriptions, e.g., *ailithir* (Ogam CIIC 193) or *Vailathi filii Vrochani* (Roman script, CIIC 460, Cornwall, but thought to be Irish = *Fáelad maic Ḟróecháin*?).

"The symbols *f* and *ph* have the same phonetic value…"; in which language (Latin or OIr.)? There is no consistent lenition of *p* to *ph* in OIr. (although it does occur occasionally). Moreover, in the examples given *oíph* and *neph-* both represent voiced spirants < **b*. David will discuss aspects of this problem as part of his nascendous article on 'apple'.

"*ph* is normally used at the end of a syllable or where the spirant has arisen from lenition of *p*… *f* in all other cases." Commenting on this, it is mentioned that *-f* is usually not found at the end of words, where it appears to have been voiced according to McCone's Law.

"Where the spirant represents original lenited *sw*… either may be used." This statement is too general. *f* is much more common than *ph*, which is very rare. This should be stated. And if the f-future should go back to **su̯*, as thought by some, then there would be very many examples of *f* indeed.

The example *graif* < Lat. *grauis* should not be taken together with the other examples as it represents a Latin /v/. There is no apparent consistency to the way Latin words are borrowed into OIr.

Thurneysen's comments on the use of the *spiritus asper* and the writing of *ct* for *cht* are certainly valid.