Proceedings of the Thurneysen Fanclub: issue 15

Records of the discussions in the conference room on 13-04-2017

In attendance: David Stifter (chair), Éimear Duffy, Nicole Volmering, Anne Harrington, Siobhán Barrett, Bernhard Bauer, Elliott Lash, Lars Nooij (scribe)

Apologies: Chantal Kobel, Theodorus Fransen, Fangzhe Qiu, Deborah Hayden
Routine apologies assumed: Romanas Bulatovas, Elizabeth Boyle, Gearóid Ua Conchubhair

Practicalities
There are Easter eggs!

Matters arising
Last week's detailed discussions gave rise to loads of responses. The published proceedings have undergone a lot of editing and contain additional material to the actual discussions during last week's meeting. First, some additions were made by Lars, having spoken with Elliott. Then David added some material. Elliott commented further upon the draft that was then sent round to the members of the fanclub, which resulted in further edits to the document before it was finalized and published online.

We now note that Fangzhe and Elliott have commented extensively on said document on academia.edu overnight. All this resulted in a meeting which was largely taken up by discussing the discussion about last week's discussions. These proceedings contain but the highlights of what was added to this during the present meeting.

Elliott's emailed comments on the previous proceedings
Elliott's comments – sent to David and Lars by e-mail – are read out during the meeting. A long time is spent discussing a sidenote on the grammatical function of stress in English relative to Old Irish, about which there is some contention between Elliott and David. Elliott argues (persuasively) that the function of stress in the two languages is not fundamentally dissimilar, but that it operates in different places and contexts.[1]

Another matter which gets discussed at some length has to do with the distinction between stressed *cía* and pretonic *ci, ce*. Elliott draws a syntactic tree to visually map the distinction in function between the two. *Cía* occurs as a specifier to the CP (Clausal Phrase), i.e. in a position where one expects to find full phrases (e.g. Noun Phrases, Prepositional Phrases, or Clausal Phrases). *Ci, ce* occurs as the C (Clausal Head), i.e. in a position where one expects to find conjunct particles. The question is raised whether this in and of itself explains why *cía* is more common? The present mapping itself does not explain this fact, but Elliott suggests approaching the matter through the distinction between 'discourse linked' and 'non-discourse linked'. The latter means that the information is completely new, whereas in the former case there is some relation to what came before. The suggestion made last week that it might have something to do with 'topicalization' is dismissed by Elliott, as topicalization has to do with old information, while WH-interrogatives (such as *cía*, *ce/ci*) are always linked to new information.

The comments added on academia.edu
Regarding the suggestion that there may be a relationship between varying stress patterns and the orthographical practice of separating words from one another, Fangzhe commented that Japanese (which, like Ancient Greek, has a melodic stress) also lacks word separation. He does note that this may be due to Chinese calligraphic influence. David comments that in Classical Chinese a grapheme more or less is equal to a syllable, which in turn is equal to a word. As there was no morphology either, there was

[1] As an example, he comments that in his English there is a difference of pronunciation between the noun 'combat' /ˈkombat/ and the verb '(to) combat' /komˈbat/ which is based solely on stress.

no need to separate words in writing. This is problematic for Japanese, which does have morphology. Elliott adds that in Japanese writing you can more or less figure out where the word-breaks are due to the use of syllabaries. However, in elevated writing one can choose not to use the syllabic signs.

There is further discussion on Elliott's further comments on David's altered sidenote on the grammatical function of stress in English relative to Old Irish. Elliott argues strongly that the stress alternations in English are not lexical (i.e. random), but rather that there are patterns and that these alternations are not learned by rote for each affected word. David notes that rote learning is in fact how foreigners learn these distinctions. Elliott rightly counters that second language learning is irrelevant in such matters.

The upshot of all this is that it is clearly very complex to decide these issues even for very well-attested languages such as Modern English. One has to take sociolects and regional dialects into account. Moreover, one must assume that there may well be lexical exceptions, resulting from words which are only learned later in life (i.e. after the extension and abstraction of the speaker's system ends at c. 13 or 14 years of age and rote learning ensues). It is noted that the Old Irish verbal system often combined multiple rules which were individually understood by its speakers (e.g. syncope, stress shift, etc.) in a single context (e.g. the shift between the deuterotonic and prototonic form of a particular verb). The sheer amount of rules operating in particular contexts may well have been too much for speakers to fit into their abstracted, internal, grammatical rule system. The complex Old Irish verbal system cannot have been maintained solely by means of rote learning, but one can envisage a scenario whereby the core lexicon in particular forms the core of the abstracted, internal, grammatical rule system, whereas less used vocabulary is added by a combination of rote learning and simplification (i.e. the material is made to fit the system, rather than the other way around).

It is commented that most speakers of Old Irish must have been illiterate. We ourselves tend to visualize sounds as letters, but wonder how sounds would be experienced in a pre-literate society. Given the existence of synesthesia one might consider whether other kinds of associations (colour, taste, etc.) might have been linked to sounds in such societies. However, it is also noted that synesthesia is relatively rare[2] and that such associations would most likely not have existed for the majority of the population. We wonder what it was like to be illiterate. It is mentioned that babies already learn to identify (and respond to) sounds before being born. Moreover, parents are known to identify shades of meaning in the cries of their babies; and we can hardly imagine that this is by means of associating such cries with letters.

Elliott commented on academia.edu that conjunctions that are not conjunct particles (such as *má*) could be in Specifier position to the Clausal Phrase. He adds that it is may be useful to map the verbal complex in terms of syntactic trees, as this forces one to be very specific about the exact relationship between the various elements (e.g. the difference between a specifier and a head). As such, he argues that this is not just a matter of using different jargon.

Fangzhe and Elliott had a discussion on academia.edu after Fangzhe noted that the statement that the head of the verb phrase is always stressed might verge on a circular argument (i.e. the stress is where the head is, but the head is usually determined on the basis of it being stressed). Elliott comments that the statement is descriptive and suggests that a native speaker might have had other means (alongside the stress) to help determine the head. [Lars: I hope I didn't make this too vague, my notes aren't all that helpful here.]

Further refining the rule of stress placement

With that we turn to Fangzhe's comment on academia.edu on the definition of a rule for the placement of the stress in the Old Irish verbal complex. Last week, we determined that we would consider the preverb(s) and the verbal root to constitute the 'verb proper', excluding the endings and anything that precedes the preverb(s) from this definition. The old rule was that: '**the stress is always on the first**

[2] Although not rare enough for it not to be (at least marginally) represented in the fanclub.

element of the verb proper, unless other positions [within the verbal complex] on the left edge of the verb proper are left unfilled; in that case, the stress is moved one position to the right within the verb proper'. It essentially worked, but only if one excludes the simple verbs (otherwise the stress might shift to the second syllable of the root of longer, simple verbs).[3]

Given that exceptions to rules are undesirable, David now proposes a modification to the old rule so that it will apply to all Old Irish verbs: **the stress is always on the first element of the verb proper, unless other positions [within the verbal complex] on the left edge of the verb proper are left unfilled; in that case, the stress is moved one position to the right within the verb proper, *but no further than the first syllable of the verbal root.*** This solves the issue.

Fangzhe's suggestion,[4] does not explain words like *níro·marbat* and *coro·marbat*, where two elements precede the stress.

Elliott concludes this part of the discussions by mapping it out in a syntactic tree format.[5]

Stress: verbal compounds (§38)
As mentioned during the last meeting, we would rather move this list of examples to a different part of the grammar. Thurneysen needed these examples to explain the position of the stress, as he operated from a position in which the stress was fundamentally placed on the second element of the verb. Since we operate from a different rule, which can explain the placement of the stress (and fundamentally places the stress on the first element of the verb), we can make do with a few illustrative examples in the chapter on phonology/phonetics.

"1. In the imperative…"; we explain the imperative through a null-hypothesis, positing that a null-element – which occupies the conjunct position – precedes the imperative verb, triggering dependent verbal forms. [DS: Structurally, this Ø-element could be related to the vocative particle *a*.]

"2. After the following conjunctions and particles, hereafter referred to as **conjunct** particles…"; at this stage we would want to include a list of all the conjunct particles. The term 'conjunct particle' is useful and will be retained; somewhere in the grammar it should be explained that this morphological category corresponds to the Clause-Head in syntax.

"(b) The interrogative particle[s]… sometimes also the interrogative pronoun **cía** (**ce, ci**)…"; it is rather *ce, ci* than *cía* in this position.

"(c) Prepositions in combination with the relative particle **(s)a^{n}**…"; this is more or less correct. This is not the place to go into more detail on this topic.

The *Handbuch* is more or less the same as the *GOI* here, although it only mentions *in* as an interrogative particle and offers fewer examples.

One should mention the (always unstressed?) adverbial particles here, i.e. *mad·, mos·, slán·, cían·, caín·, mí·, ceta·*, etc. Essentially, we want to gather all the relevant elements that trigger these stress shifts in one place. One should also add *ro·*, *imma·* and *con·*.

The question is raised whether these are all aspectual markers, having something to do with the way an action is conceived. This leads to an exposition of what is meant by 'aspect'. Here two distinctions must be made: 1) *Aspekt* relates to whether a verbal action is conceived as being finished or not, 2) *Aktionsart*

[3] In the meantime, Lars proposed a different rule, involving left-ward movement, which failed rather spectacularly.
[4] Which was that there is always a tendency to move the stress rightward within the verbal complex, but with the restrictions that only one preverb or conjunct particle (at most) is allowed to stand before the stress and that rightward movement stops at the first syllable of the verbal root.
[5] DS: 'Tis a pity we took no photos. Reminder to oneself: *dligit cranna taidbsena* 'trees deserve pictures'.

relates to an inherent property of a verbal action in itself (beginning, ending, etc.). One can further distinguish between verbal actions that are atelic (i.e. without an implied ending – e.g. ‘to beat’), and those that are telic (i.e. that have an intrinsic end – e.g. ‘to slay’). It is not immediately apparent that the adverbial particles are related to this.

Finally, it is stated that we wish to treat stress fully and in one place in the grammar, rather than scattering it out all over the grammar in the detailed discussions of the various issues that each have a bearing on the placement of stress.