Proceedings of the Thurneysen Fanclub: issue 37

Records of the discussions in the Conference Room on 23-04-2018

In attendance: David Stifter (chair), Fangzhe Qiu, Bernhard Bauer, Elliott Lash, Siobhán Barrett, Theodorus Fransen, Romanas Bulatovas, Lars Nooij (scribe)

Apologies: Daniel Watson

Practicalities
We congratulate David on winning the award for being the researcher of the year in the Faculty of Arts, Celtic Studies and Philosophy here in Maynooth.

We also congratulate Deborah for winning the award for the best early-career researcher in the same category (which means that the department of Early Irish Studies made a clean sweep of the awards this year!).[1]

Given that Elliott is in attendance, it is no great surprise that he "throws in a remark". Last week we discussed the impossibility of the sequence *-lnd-* in Old Irish, but Elliott raises the possibility that it could exist in **calndae, the gen. sg. of *caland* 'calends'. The word *caland* (is it actually attested written out like this? eDIL does not quote a relevant example) is a nom. sg. *ā*-stem noun which derives from the Latin plural noun *kalendae*. However, it is usually found written by means of an abbreviation (<kł>). Given that it is a singular in Old Irish, this implies a Vulgar Latin preform *kalenda, or probably actually *kalanda (cf. *tauerna > tauarna*). In the gen. sg. this would be **kalendae > *kalandae*. Through syncope, this yields *kalnde, but David believes that the *n* is then immediately deleted, yielding *caldae*. Later on, through assimilation within the Old Irish period, this becomes *callae*. This latter gen. sg. form then influences the nom. sg., resulting in a new nom. sg. *callann*, which in turn gives rise to a new gen. sg. *calnae*. This word actually nicely illustrates the impossibility of the sequence *-lnd-* and its possibly resolutions.

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[1] It is noted that Deborah is once again congratulated *in absentia*.

More 'vowel contractions' (§114 - continued)

"Examples of contraction in fully stressed disyllables are still very rare…" What does 'still' mean? Relative to what? Does this mean during the 8th century, or during the entirety of the Old Irish period? The example from the Leiden Priscianus (Thes. II. 231, 23) is not particularly old, as the manuscript is believed to be from the 9th or 10th century. The German is no clearer: "…zeigen sich erst…"

The word *tee* 'hot' is often believed to be disyllabic (< PC **teφent-* < **tepent-* 'being warm'); its pl. *téit* shows that it is one of the rare *nt*-stem adjectives in Celtic. However, its disyllabicity in Old Irish is unproven, given a lack of metrical evidence and the fact that *tee* could also be a spelling for *té* and *téit* is entirely ambiguous. It is therefore not an ideal example. The word *loön > lón* was indeed originally disyllabic, so it is a good example. For ·*díg* vs. *deïch*, it is again unestablished by means of the spelling whether the latter has a hiatus, although it is etymologically expected. The words *máäm, foöt* and *biïth* were indeed originally disyllabic and are therefore relevant here.

Thurneysen essentially presents the view that hiatus was slowly lost over the course of Old Irish. However, it seems likely to us that Blathmac had already lost hiatus in his spoken language, which would imply that hiatus was lost early in the Old Irish period. This would mean that glosses which appear to show hiatus in their spellings are archaic. Then again, it seems probable that the hiatus-forms would have existed as alternative forms for a while, alongside the contracted forms (i.e. the change would not have gone to completion all at once). Register must have played an important part in the use of these variant forms. And it should be noted that Blathmac would have had a motivation for liberally using variants with or without hiatus in different lines, depending on the needs of the metre.

Then again, Liam Breathnach thinks that Siobhán and David have been too hasty in their assessment of the status of hiatus in the language of Blathmac. This is certainly a topic which requires further and more systematic study. We do note though that Blathmac seem to have two cases where he actually uses hiatus where it should not have existed (i.e. in a hypercorrect / highly artificial fashion): namely in *Diä* (which might be poetically excusable) and in *fíal* 'veil' (which is 'bad').

Elliott suggests that it might be worthwhile to compare the loss of hiatus to the use of contracted verb forms (e.g. *ticc*). Of course, the two developments are different (the first involves pretonic elision, whereas the second involves the loss of posttonic vowels), but there might be an alignment between the two which could be tested using the Constant Rate Effect test. One worry is, though, that there might not be enough evidence in any one source to actually test the matter statistically.

It is a striking peculiarity that Blathmac was never quoted in any medieval Irish gloss, tract, or glossary. Moreover, his poems are only preserved in a single, late manuscript (and the same goes for a few more of the texts preserved in that self-same manuscript, NLI G 50). Was Blathmac simply unknown to the later tradition, or was he considered to have written in a low register, or otherwise have been considered an unsuitable source?

When studying Blathmac's use of hiatus, it should probably be compared to the use of hiatus in the *Féilire Óengusso*, which dates to about 800 AD, roughly two generations after Blathmac. The good thing is that both poems, albeit rather different in style, are of a fair size. Moreover, there may be some link between Blathmac and the *céili Dé*. As mentioned before, unlike Blathmac, *Óengus* seems to have mostly gotten his hiatuses right, according to our idealised standards (or is this due to the editors of the text?). *Saltair na Rann* might also be of interest, but is rather late; hiatus should be gone from the spoken

language at that stage. Therefore it would be all the more interesting to see where the author of *Saltair na Rann* does use hiatus.

A major problem in all this is Scottish Gaelic, which essentially preserves hiatus, although the details are probably complex. For example, hiatus is preserved in *piuthar* /p'u.ər/ 'sister' and *fiathach* /fi.əχ/ 'raven', but has elsewhere often been lost, perhaps due to analogy. We should of course recall that there was already synchronic allomorphy in Old Irish itself (e.g. *coäir* vs. *córae*) and influence of this type could be behind some of the cases where Sc. Gaelic has lost hiatus, e.g. in *deug* (< *deëc*) and *òg* (< *öac*).

In the word *oöl* (> Mod. Ir. *ól*) Hamp claimed to have heard it pronounced as a disyllabic word in Sc. Gaelic in the fifties, whilst doing fieldwork, but this seems to imply that the usual form would be *òl*. This word is often mistaken for a monosyllabic word in Old Irish, but it was definitely disyllabic (and it is not directly cognate with Lat. *pōculum*!).

At any rate, it is rather problematic that whereas Sc. Gaelic preserved hiatus, Blathmac, who certainly appears to be from the north of Ireland, would have already lost it by the early 8th century. And this is rendered even more awkward if Óengus, two generations later, would have retained it quite well. All this means that hiatus is a much more complicated matter than Thurneysen implied it to be. It requires a full and systematic study before we can establish the extent to which it was still part of the spoken language during the Old Irish period.

Quality change in pretonic vowels (§115)
"Vocalism of Pretonic Words" (German "Zum Vokalismus der proklitischen Wörter"). A pretonic 'word' must presumably be, by definition, a proclitic, so the two titles signify more or less the same thing. It would probably be better to talk about proclitics or pretonic syllables, though.

"In pretonic words *a* often appears for *e*, occasionally for *o*; this is parallel to the frequent change of palatal to neutral consonants in such words." This comes down to two different matters. The first, the change of *e* > *a* in pretonic syllables is a general sound-law, which took place after the depalatalisation of these syllables (i.e. rather late, as late as the seventh century). The second, the change of *o* > *a* is less clear-cut and seems to involve analogy. Moreover, the first probably changed the *e* into /a/, whereas the second probably turned *o* into /ə/, which was then written as <a> in these non-palatal, unstressed contexts.

The preposition *la* was indeed still *le* in the earliest sources (note that in Mod. Ir. *le* this change has been reversed on the basis of the stressed forms, which preserved the old vocalism).

Synchronically, this sound law yielded variation, not just between stressed and unstressed forms of prepositions, but also in the verbal complex, e.g. *as·beir* vs. *·epir*.

Pretonic *as-* vs. stressed *oss-* (*uss-*) is the only example involving *u* and is probably due to analogy with *as-* < *ess-*.

As to *calléic* for expected *colléic*, this is problematic. Are we dealing with a pretonic reduction of the vowel to *schwa* here, or perhaps some form of analogy? The adverb *amach* is not a good parallel, given that it is more properly *immach* in Old Irish. The word *immallé* is problematic as regards *imma-* (does the *a* derive from a pronoun *-e* reduced to *schwa*?).

So, at any rate, there are two changes here: 1) > /a/ (only *e* and not interconsonantal?)

2) > /ə/ (interconsonantal?)

The preposition *for* 'on' (< *u̯or*) has the variant *far*, but this does not seem to be attested very often in early texts. The 2pl. poss. pron. *for, far, bar* (< *su̯er-*) 'your' is attested with much more variation, which seems to imply that it was actually pronounced /vər/. This makes the latter an early example of voicing in this context.

As to whether *ocus* or *acus* is the earlier pronunciation, we do not know. In the German, Thurneysen suggests that *acus* was original and that the *o* of *ocus* came later, due to the influence of the *u*-quality of the *c*.

Looking at this paragraph in the *Handbuch*, we note that it is much more precise and has a clearer presentation than its English counterpart. It also uses different examples, some of which are good and some of which are not. Interestingly, Thurneysen here suggests that there is also a synchronic change *aCV > aCa*, but we are not certain about this (although it seems to work for his examples).

"Pretonic *in-* (§ 842 B) from *en(i)-* may have been influenced by stressed *in-*." This may well be correct (or is it due to the influence of **inde*?), as one does not find ***an·* which would be expected, given all the other data

"But the contrast between **is(s)** 'is', **it** 'are' and the other persons **am, at, as, ammi, adib, ata** (§ 792) is remarkable. It has been rightly explained as due to the frequent combination of **is, it** with the nominative of personal pronouns of the 3rd person, all of which have palatal vocalism: **iss é, is sí, iss ed, it é** (§ 406)." This is indeed remarkable and there must certainly be some form of analogy, or other outside influence going on here. The forms *is* and *it* are indeed the odd ones out.

"*e* before *a*, *o* often becomes *i*, e.g. **ci as·bera** 'though he says' for **ce**; **li-a** 'with his' (primary form **le**, § 845); **ci ó fut** 'how long?' for **ce, cía**, § 456 f." Yes, this is correct, but he should state explicitly that he means that this happens when the two vowels follow each other immediately, i.e. in hiatus. We already discussed this development of *e > i* /_a,o in hiatus. These examples show that it also happened across word-boundaries.

"In the same position *o* occasionally becomes *u*, e.g. **fu-a** 'under his' beside **fo-a** (and **fó**)." This is probably correct. It again concerns hiatus position.

"Loss of Vowels" (§116)
Thurneysen is really discussing matters relating to the apocope here, which is definitely a prehistoric phenomenon. He is also extremely succinct, which makes it harder to follow what he is on about.

The PIE gen. of the 2sg. pers. pron. was *te̯u̯e* (cf. Sanskrit *taua* and Latvian *tevis*), which should regularly give Old Irish *toí*, proclitic ***ta*. However, *te̯u̯e* > PC *to̯u̯e* must early on have been unstressed and in Core Celtic (i.e. Gaulish, British and Irish, to the exclusion of Celtiberian) the final *e* of unstressed words was lost. This means that PC *to̯u̯e* > Core Celtic *to̯u̯*. This could be attested in Gaulish inscriptions in the form *to*, in positions where the word could mean 'your'. Following this loss one regularly gets Old Irish *to, do* and this development is now generally accepted.

"A few adverbs, however, which in the course of time had come to be used as preverbs, evidently retained their final vowel. In proclisis their first syllable was not strongly stressed, and thus they were not liable to syncope, which normally affects the vowel following a stressed syllable (§ 106). Accordingly the old final syllable remained. Cp. **cetu** 'at first' (§§ 393, 398), Gaul. *Cintu-*; the preposition **ceta· cita·** (§ 828), Gk. κατά; **remi·** 'before'(§ 851) and the like." Yes, well, it should firstly be noted that these adverbs were unaffected by what we discussed a moment ago, because they were still stressed when the aforementioned sound-change took place. However, Thurneysen's claim that syncope did not affect a pretonic second syllable in these instances seems dodgy.

More "Loss of Vowels" (§117)
"Proclitic groups of three or four syllables are often reduced to two by dropping the interior vowels…" And here he was claiming that pretonic syllables were less liable to syncope, mere moments before suggesting that longer proclitic groups were liable to be especially thoroughly syncopated!

The Ml. form *maniptis* is weird, as it has syncope in the third syllable. Could the form *mainbed* be for *manibed*, assuming a scribal error with the minims? As to *airmdis* for *arim-betis*, might this be due to reanalysis of *airm-* as a base root, with an ending *-btis*?

As to *nímalle* for *ní immalle*, this looks like elision, although minim confusion is also a possible explanation. And in *isnanaicci* for *is inn-a n-aicci* this could be either due to haplology or syncope.

In short, most of the examples can be explained away as being due to regular syncope, or to analogy with regularly syncopated forms, or to reanalysis. As such, there is no need to postulate a rule of exemption from syncope, or other losses of vowels in pretonic syllables on the basis of this evidence. This and the preceding paragraph can be dropped from the grammar, as they contain no new information.

Outlook
Turning the page, we note that we will now advance into the rather long consonant section of the grammar. We can probably continue skipping a lot of it, as it mainly deals with diachronic matters, albeit sometimes with synchronic implications. We will probably try to continue meeting over the next few months, even when only a few members are present, as this large chapter is in many respects uncontroversial (either uncontroversially correct or uncontroversially outdated) and we would like to get through it as quickly as possible.

Pages read in this session: 2.
Paragraphs discussed: §§114–117.