Proceedings of the Thurneysen Fanclub: issue 1

Records of the discussions at the ChronHib bar/beár on 21-09-2016

In attendance: David Stifter (chair), Elizabeth Boyle, Siobhán Barrett, Deborah Hayden, Gearóid Úa Conchubhair, Chantal Kobel, Lára Ní Mhaoláin, Fangzhe Qiu, Elliott Lash, Romanas Bulatovas, Lars Nooij (scribe)

Preliminaries
This is a very informal event, which arose out of talks within the ChronHib project. The Fanclub will meet on Wednesdays at one pm and meetings will last up to about three pm at the latest. All with an interest in Old Irish grammar are welcome to join and express their views on the subject.

The aim is to read Thurneysen's *A Grammar of Old Irish* (1946) (GOI) from cover to cover, with great attention to detail and with an eye to revision. This process will likely take years. At the outset, it is stressed that we have the highest respect for Thurneysen's seminal work. A century after first publication, it is still the standard grammar of the language and it fundamentally still holds up. Thurneysen combined great ability and understanding with a remarkable clarity of expression. However, this does not preclude the need to incorporate later discoveries. These meetings are to facilitate that process.

Although the GOI is sound in general, its section on (historical) phonology is completely outdated and will be skipped in these readings. Instead, we shall focus on its synchronic description of the language. In addition, it must be noted that the description of syntax is scattered throughout the book. And indeed, this is true for the discipline on the whole. Brief mentions exist, but a complete picture is lacking. As one of the goals of the ChronHib project is to produce a comprehensive volume on OIr. syntax, any input on this front would also be welcome.

As the initial response to these meetings has been very positive – including requests for a live-stream – it has been decided that summaries will be shared on the ChronHib facebook-page.

Brief Overview of OIr. Grammars
Like any other work, the GOI does not stand on its own. In particular, it may be considered in light of its predecessor: *Handbuch des Alt-Irischen* (1909), also by Thurneysen. The GOI at times differs considerably from the *Handbuch*. These differences may be explained both by the interference of some forty years between the two, but also by the revisions made by Binchy and Bergin in translating the book from the German. It is proposed to read the *Handbuch* in parallel to the GOI, comparing them as we go along. In addition, it is considered useful to compare Thurneysen's work with that of other grammarians, both on matters of analysis/content and style of presentation.

The first grammar of OIr. was, essentially, the early medieval *Auraicept na n-Éces* 'the scholars' primer'. It may contain some useful information on how the speakers of OIr. regarded their own language. Otherwise, it is obviously outdated.

The first modern grammar of the language was developed by the German historian Johann Kaspar Zeuss in his *Grammatica Celtica* (1853). Zeuss' work was an incredible achievement. All earlier grammars had been based on the modern Celtic languages. Moreover, he was limited in his access to

the sources to his own transcriptions of the glosses. The foundational influence of this work cannot be overstated and his premises that one must start with the earliest sources to gain an understanding of a language has held up well. However, it must be noted that his original work – much like the *Handbuch* – is rarely studied. Rather, it is the revised and considerably altered edition by Ebel (1871) which became well known and influential amongst later scholars.

Next to appear was Windisch's *Kurzgefasste irische Grammatik* (1879), translated into English by Norman Moore as *A Concise Irish Grammar* (1882). In this brief grammar, Windisch makes use of rather different examples than those used by Thurneysen, leading up to different viewpoints. As such, we will look into Windisch's work as well, again ignoring its section on phonology.

Following the publication of Hogan's largely forgotten *Outlines of the Grammar of Old Irish* (1900), the *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* (1901-3) by Stokes and Strachan was published, rendering the main sources of OIr. easily accessible for study for the first time. This publication immediately sparked a number of important contributions. As mentioned above, Thurneysen's *Handbuch* appeared in 1909. Additionally, Pedersen wrote his *Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen* (1909-13). During the meeting, note was made of the particular usefulness of Pedersen's discussion of the verbal stems in the Celtic languages (in light of which mention should also be made of Schumarcher's *Die keltischen Primärverben* (2004)). Finally, Strachan's *Old Irish Paradigms and Selections from the Old Irish* Glosses (1904-5) was the first book written specifically to accommodate the needs of students of Old Irish.

Also from this period are Vendryes' *Grammaire du Vieil-Irlandais* (1908), O'Connell's *A grammar of Old Irish* (1912) and Pokorny's *A Concise Old Irish Grammar and Reader* (1914). The latter, although very brief, stands out – as noticed during this meeting – for containing a relatively sizeable, distinct section on syntax.

Dottin's *Manuel d'Irlandais Moyen* (1913) may also be considered, as its definition of 'Middle Irish' is considerably broad and includes much earlier material. It is reputed to have a particularly useful section on verbal noun clauses (although it is now largely superseded by Karin Stüber's work).

After these works, for much of the remainder of the 20th century, contributions to the understanding of OIr. grammar were more generally made on specific topics (published for example, as articles in *Ériu*), rather than in the form of comprehensive grammars. This information needs to be taken on board in revising the GOI.

Towards the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century, a number of new books on OIr. grammar were published. First of these is *Stair na Gaeilge* (1994), which includes McCone's important chapter on Old Irish and Breatnach's chapter on Middle Irish. Mention is also made of McCone's *The early Irish verb* (1987).

In addition, a considerable number of workbooks and grammars written specifically to aid students appeared. These include Stifter's *Sengoídelc: Old Irish for Beginners* (2006), which its author stresses was never intended as a grammar (for this see rather his chapter on OIr. in *The Celtic Languages* (2009), which offers a consciously synchronic description of the language), Ahlqvist's *Grammatical Tables for Old Irish* (2013), De Vries' *A student's companion to Old Irish grammar* (2013) and Anthony Greene's *Old Irish verbs and vocabulary* (1995).

Approach/Scope

At this point a note is made that Thurneysen attempted to provide a standardized description of OIr. whereas it should now be considered whether or not it might be better to more strictly separate the sources in sections. Moreover, we should, perhaps, make a more rigid division between the diachronic and synchronic description of the language.

A further matter which is now raised concerns the desired scope for a revised grammar of OIr. Should it aim to be comprehensive? Up-to-date descriptions of parts of the grammar can already be found in other books. Nonetheless, it is considered best for a new grammar to be comprehensive for the sake of providing the reader with a concise overview of the language as a whole. This would be of use both for students and specialists from other fields.

A suggestion is made, and adopted, to read contemporary reviews of Thurneysen's work. Where might they have been published (*Éigse*, perhaps)? It is also mentioned that the correspondence of Kuno Meyer has recently been published; it will be ordered for the university library. In light of this, brief mention is also made of the fact that Thurneysen's archive in Bonn has seen little attention in recent years. Additionally, it was mentioned that the notes taken by a linguist studying OIr. in Ireland during the 1920s have recently been published digitally in Estonia; it might be useful to look into that as well.

It is also mentioned that we might consider submitting a paper on the history of scholarship on Irish grammar for the conference of the Henry Sweet Society.

GOI: Title Page and Translator's Preface

Like many works published in this period, the GOI bears a remarkably humble name, '*A Grammar of Old Irish*' (similarly, the *Dictionary of the Irish Language* was in full called but *Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language*). Thurneysen tends to be very careful in his phrasing, staying extremely true to the facts in his choice of words. The title may be considered an example of this practice, which in general helps to explain that the GOI remains fundamentally sound to this day.

(Eduard) Rudolf Thurneysen (1857-1940) was a Swiss linguist from Basel, who (from 1913 onwards) taught in Bonn, Germany. Other 18th and 19th century Thurneysens known from Basel were a professor of history and a theologian, implying that Rudolf Thurneysen may have come from a highly educated family. Although he had published in English before, he left the matter of translating his (revised) *Handbuch* into English to his student, the Irish diplomat Daniel Anthony Binchy (1899-1989) and the Irish scholar Osborn (Joseph) Bergin (1873-1950). Thurneysen himself was nonetheless actively involved, first in rewriting the *Handbuch* and then in revising the draft English translation until the outbreak of war and his subsequent death precluded further contributions. The translators – out of respect for its author – in completing the work refrained from significantly altering the text even where they disagreed with Thurneysen's views. Nonetheless, editorial changes were made and, as mentioned briefly before, this makes it particularly worthwhile to compare the present work with its German original.

GOI: Abbreviations

Remarkably few grammatical abbreviations were used (or listed?) and some interesting languages appear (e.g. Tyrolese).

GOI: Introduction - The Celtic Languages
The first section of the introduction concerns a brief classification and description of the Celtic languages. Its treatment of the Continental Celtic languages is, of course, completely outdated. Its treatment of the Brittonic languages is also in need of revision. However, we shall focus exclusively on the first page, which deals mainly with the Goidelic languages.

The general references found underneath the header (descriptions of the Celts in general) were not present in the *Handbuch* and must have been added specifically to the English edition. They are, understandably, outdated. It is a matter for discussion whether or not such general references should be added to a revised grammar. However, it is settled that the following works would be suitable candidates for inclusion: *The Celtic Languages* (2009), Koch's *Celtic Culture: a Historical Encyclopedia* (2006) and Russell's *An Introduction to the Celtic Languages* (1995). Links to Wikipedia articles were also suggested, but should perhaps rather be considered as general knowledge, precluding the need for any specific reference.

The first line of §1, while certainly correct, stands apart from both the title ('The Celtic Languages') and what follows. As such, it seems better either to move it to some sort of preface, or add it later on, when OIr. itself is being discussed.

Thurneysen does not explain what is meant by the terms OIr. and Indo-European at the outset. These terms can no longer be assumed as standard background knowledge and should be carefully explained, including a brief discussion of the place of OIr. within the Indo-European language family.

The division of the Celtic languages into Insular and Continental Celtic on a purely geographical basis was a safe choice on Thurneysen's part as it cannot be refuted. Nonetheless, additional divisions (chronological, type, extent of attestations) need to be added at the outset. Moreover, the genetic relations of the Celtic languages need to be discussed and various theories posited to reflect the fact that it is an open question at present.

In all such matters of genetic relationship, treatment of controversial matters should be limited to those that have a bearing on OIr. itself. As such, issues such as that of the relation between Insular Celtic and Gaulish, P- and Q-Celtic, Italo-Celtic, the North-Western grouping and Lusitanian should be mentioned and discussed. More distantly related cases such as that of the Indo-Hittite hypothesis need not be mentioned at all, as they are effectively irrelevant to a discussion of OIr.

It is felt that Thurneysen's definition of the Insular Celtic languages as 'the Celtic languages of Great Britain (incl. one that has spread from there) and Ireland' is lacking. It does not acknowledge the spread of these languages to other regions, such as northern Spain (Bretoña) and Iceland within the medieval period, nor its spread to other continents in later times. Furthermore, the use of these languages in monastic foundations on the European Continent should be mentioned as it is directly relevant to the fact that the main sources of OIr. derive from such centres.

There are many issues with Thurneysen's explanation of the name for the Goidelic languages. 'Ancient' is a meaninglessly imprecise term. Moreover, the term *Goídel* is an exonym derived from British. By the 9th century Cormac used the term *Sengoídelc* to refer to the earlier stages of the Irish language, but it may be difficult to ascertain the earlier self-name for the language. Broad, tribal divisions may have been more significant to the identity of its speakers than any common name. We shall return to this issue in greater detail during next week's meeting.