

# Proceedings of the Thurneysen Fanclub: issue 18

Records of the discussions in the conference room on 01-06-2017

In attendance: David Stifter (chair), Theodorus Fransen, Chantal Kobel, Deborah Hayden, Daniel Watson, Siobhán Barrett, Anne Harrington, Fangzhe Qiu, Elliott Lash, Lars Nooij (scribe)

Apologies: Nicole Volmering

Routine apologies assumed: Romanas Bulatovas, Gearóid Úa Conchubhair, Bernhard Bauer, Elizabeth Boyle, Lára Ní Mhaoláin

## Practicalities

The scribe has now caught up with typing the proceedings of the last three meetings, but David apologizes for the delay in processing and publishing them. Hopefully, the upcoming long weekend will afford him the opportunity to spend some time on it.<sup>1</sup>

## Half-length / phonetic lengthening of short vowels (§45)

“Original short vowels are sometimes marked long when followed in the same syllable by unlenited *m*, *n*, *l*, *r*. Accordingly they must have at least sounded longer than the normal short vowel. Most, though not all, of them are long in the modern dialects also.” This is fundamentally correct, but needs to be better presented.

What does “sometimes marked long” mean? The scribes are inconsistent in marking vowel length anyway. However, this is of course distinct from the usual matter. Usually, one is dealing with an underlyingly/etymologically long vowel which can be written either with or without a fada. In this case we are dealing with underlyingly/etymologically short vowels which can also be written either with or without a fada. So there may well be something to it. Moreover, there seems to be a system behind it.

How should we nowadays express Thurneysen’s “sounded longer than the normal short vowel”? We would say that it is a sub-phonological, phonetic feature. As it has no distinguishing function, there is no need to include this in a claim for ‘half-length’ (as known from Classical Modern Irish) to have existed in OIr. (In relation to the previous discussion on half-length, mention is made of an article by Carney on this aspect of bardic grammar.)

“Most, though not all, of them are long in the modern dialects also.” For example, *carr* /kār/, with automatic lengthening before <rr>. But the rules are quite complex and not uniform across the dialects, e.g. *ann*, Munster /aun̪/ (and they are also diphthongs in Scottish Gaelic). Raymond Hickey has a chapter on this in “The Dialects of Irish” (p. 263 ff.: “Vowels before Tense Sonorants”). However, Thurneysen’s Old Irish features do not seem to reflect entirely the same phenomenon. In Modern Irish, the main source of the phenomenon appears to be the reduction of homorganic consonant clusters ( $C_1C_2 > C_1C_1$ ; e.g. *fīnd* > *fīnn*). Thurneysen’s Old Irish examples are almost all of a different type:

- *rán*, usually attested as *rann*: This does not continue an old cluster *\*-nd*. The lack of <nn> in writing is curious, does its reduction to <n> go along with unexpected lengthening of the vowel? But there is no sign of this in metrical sources.
- *lóndas*, usually *londas*: This does continue an old cluster *\*-nd*.

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<sup>1</sup> Well, well, well... [comment from 1 December 2017]

- *téntide*: the cluster arises through syncope (< *těnet*<sup>o</sup>) and is therefore not old.
- *tróm*, usually *trom(m)*: No cluster.
- *ímdae*: The cluster is not homorganic. The fada might be explained as a graphic sign to avoid minim confusion (depends on scribal practices).
- *báll*: No cluster.

Other examples are suggested: *trén* < *\*treksno*. This probably has an early loss of *\*-s-* and accordingly regular compensatory lengthening after the loss of *χ*. Its British counterpart Welsh and Cornish *tren* (with short vowel) is odd; perhaps it is a loanword from Irish? Also: *lúan* < *\*louksna*, but this is inherently long (Welsh *llun*).

- *mílsi*: This is not homorganic; this might also be explained as a graphic sign.
- *du-árchomraicset*: Perhaps this is due to a reanalysis of the preverbs? Multiple explanations seem possible.
- *árt-phersine*: *árd* becomes long later on, curious.

“In unstressed syllables...”; in Middle Irish the plural endings *-tis, -mis* are lengthened to *-tís, -mís* so some lengthening in unstressed syllables must have happened. Some of the examples offered by Thurneysen can, however, perhaps again be explained as graphemes. We don’t quite know how to explain these examples. A nasal environment is considered, but that does not cover all the examples. Neither does inherited, underlying length. They actually seem to be quite similar to the stressed examples.

Hickey explains the modern phenomenon as being due to the lengthening influence of long/fortis sonorants on the preceding vowel. This resulted in super-heavy syllables (reference to Lass for examples)<sup>2</sup>. Hickey considers this to be a purely phonetic lengthening, which only applies to monosyllabic items. We wonder whether it might not also apply to polysyllabic words, given the examples from the earlier language. In Modern Irish the conditioning factor – the distinction between long/fortis and short/lenis sonorants – was lost, but the vowel length remained, e.g. *gann* /gǎn/ vs. *gan* /gǎn/ (although this is not the best example as the former is stressed, whereas the latter is unstressed).

Hickey’s explanation is very similar to that offered by bardic teaching (c. 11<sup>th</sup> century?), for in these cases the increased vowel length was not considered to be original, or inherent, but to be due to the influence of what follows (i.e. the long sonorant).

### Half-length / phonetic lengthening of short vowels continued (§46)

“(a) Vowels are occasionally marked long before *r* + consonant, even where there is no evidence that the *r* was unlenited...”; this is wrong, the *r*’s in these examples are definitely unlenited. As such, it is the same as what is found in the previous paragraph and should be included there.

“(b) In stressed syllables the mark of length is sometimes found, especially in Wb., over any vowel in syllabic auslaut which is followed by a lenited consonant...”; in the case of *níme* we might again be dealing with a grapheme for separating minims. Otherwise, this might perhaps just be part of what David calls a natural phonetic tendency to lengthen CVCV clusters > CV:CV, which one also finds in German and Dutch. Is this ever observed in the modern language? At any rate, all this needs to be properly quantified.

“Elsewhere, as in **mág** ‘field’ Wb. 12<sup>a</sup>25, the mark of length is probably a mere scribal error.” Why call this a scribal error, but accept the rest?

These paragraphs are presented in a rather unsatisfying fashion, but certainly offer avenues for future research.

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<sup>2</sup> David: “Not Lash, not Lars.”

### Vowel length in hiatus (§47)

“There are indications that stressed **long vowels** were shortened **in hiatus**.” The evidence for this depends entirely on the (haphazard) extent to which fada’s were written by the scribes. Moreover, one needs to take care to distinguish between words with underlying long vowels (e.g. *\*tā*) and those with underlying short vowels.

“...however, marks of length are occasionally found, not merely over original long vowels ... but also over vowels which were originally short... Within our period, therefore, hiatus-vowels have been lengthened under the accent, though whether they have the full quantity of other long vowels is doubtful.” Thurneysen seems to say that long vowels were shortened and short vowels lengthened under identical conditions. That is highly contradictory.

David believes that vowel length was neutralized in hiatus; as such, a fada could be placed there, but was not indicative of a long vs. short opposition, as this was simply non-existent in hiatus. In any case, the duration of vowel-length in this position is unprovable.

Fangzhe mentions the words *tóë*, *toe* and *tuae*, *oä* and *uä*, and *liä* which he has been working on, which tie in to this topic. In the case of *liä*, *liäcc* (< *\*līyank-*) the hiatus is lost when the word has more than two syllables, e.g. *lecaib*. Interestingly, in *lecaib* the vowel is /ē/, although it goes back to *\*tā*; this can be interpreted as evidence for shortening.

*Tēt*, Wb. 29<sup>a</sup>1 “hot” is interesting as it derives from *\*tepent-*. The hiatus shows that *\*p* > *\*φ* > *ø* can’t have been lost at an early stage. However, there is no definitive proof that the hiatus was retained into the OIr. period – that is a matter of interpretation. The same goes for *dēib*, which could also have been monosyllabic for the scribe. So the evidence for ‘lengthening of short vowels in hiatus’ is rather weak.

As to *in-dáas*, Ml. 85<sup>b</sup>11, could the double vowel + fada be meant to express a single, long vowel? The problem is that this would be an unusual orthography for Milan, although the practice is found elsewhere, e.g. in Würzburg. On the other hand, the verb occurs multiple times written with just a single vowel in the Milan glosses, which leads one to suspect that hiatus had been lost. *In-dáas* might be little more than a hypercorrect spelling.

### Vowels in pretonic syllables (§48)

“5. **Vowels in pretonic words** are generally shortened in the same way as vowels in post-tonic syllables...”; it is actually quite difficult to say exactly what happened in pretonic syllables. According to Thurneysen, pretonic vowels are treated the same as post-tonic vowels.

It is possible to distinguish at least four different syllabic positions in OIr.: 1) pretonic, 2) tonic, 3) post-tonic word-internal, 4) post-tonic absolute-final. Moreover, OIr. had an unbalanced vowel system (unlike the British languages)<sup>3</sup> David drew a helpful overview of the short vowel system in OIr.:

pretonic		tonic		post-tonic (internal)		post-tonic (absolute final)	
i/ē	o/u	i	u			i	u
	ě/a	e	o	ə	u	e	(o)
		a				a	
= 5 > 3		= 5		= 2		= 5 > 4	

<sup>3</sup> [Lars: There is actually some distinction between long and short vowels where stressed vowels can be long and unstressed vowels are always short in Welsh (from later Old Welsh onwards) though; admittedly, this is nowhere near as complex as the Irish distinctions, which is more or less the rule for these languages.]

As may be seen, in tonic position the full set of five basic vowels were distinguished, although some neutralisation between *i/e* and *u/o* did occur (due to raising and lowering). In post-tonic (internal) position there was only a two-way distinction between schwa and *u* (unless one operates with *u*-quality of consonants, in which case the system is quite different). In post-tonic (absolute-final) position *o* and *a* merged in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century, but distinctions are otherwise maintained into the 9<sup>th</sup> and even 10<sup>th</sup> century. In pretonic position the full set of five is only found in very early OIr. Early on *o* and *u* merge; *ē* and *a* also merge early on. Nasalized *ē* merges with *i* after the 8<sup>th</sup> century.

From this it is also clear that the shortening of pretonic long vowels was not the same as that of post-tonic vowels, as the resulting vowel distinctions are different, e.g. *\*k<sup>i</sup>/<sub>a</sub>ntu-* > *cēta* > *ceta* vs. *\*karban-to-* > *carbat* (not *carbet*).

Turning to page 34: “Beyond doubt, therefore, such vowels were sometimes pronounced longer than normally.” This is rather vague.

“It may be that words with an original long vowel sometimes retained their quantity in pretonic position and at other times were shortened.” This does not solve the quoted examples, as almost all of them had an originally short vowel. We wonder whether the fada’s might somehow be used here to distinguish the pretonic part from the tonic part of the word (i.e. by marking the vowel directly before the stress). An allusion is made to another non-phonetic use of the fada in both early British and Irish manuscripts, namely the use of fada’s to indicate that a word is in the vernacular, rather than in Latin. It is also suggested that they might just be misplaced fada’s, as length marks are often found placed over adjacent consonants – these might therefore just be more extreme cases of such a displacement. Another suggestion is that the scribes might sometimes have used fada’s to mark *a* in a manner similar to *i*, simply to make it stand out on the manuscript page. All this warrants further investigation of the exact scribal practices of the manuscripts.

At any rate, Thurneysen’s explanation is untenable. Moreover, *cía* vs. *ce* is not a good example, as the differing stress/phrasal patterns of these forms might have influenced the matter. As to *ní* and *ni*, and *maní* and *mani*, and analogy on the basis of these forms: maybe or maybe not – it certainly does not offer definitive proof.

“In the present work the mark of length is shown in the cases mentioned §§45-48 only when it is found in the MS. However, the preps. *ó* ‘from, by’, and *ós* ‘above’, though the vowel may sometimes have been short, are marked long even where there is no mark of length in the MS.” *Ós* was certainly sometimes shortened later on, as we find both *os cionn* and *uas* in the modern language. We don’t like Thurneysen’s editorial practice here, as we would prefer one to be consistent in how manuscript forms are cited.

We would probably leave this paragraph out altogether, as it appears to be a matter of orthography, rather than quantity.<sup>4</sup>

We will skip the diachronic parts of the following paragraphs (up to §66), but look into anything to do with synchronic variation.

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<sup>4</sup> Siobhán: “This reminds me of Father Ted: ‘this is an ecumenical matter’ ~ ‘this is an orthographical matter’.”