# Proceedings of the Thurneysen Fanclub: issue 21

Records of the discussions in the conference room on 09-10-2017

In attendance: David Stifter (chair), Elliott Lash, Fangzhe Qiu, Daniel Watson, Ekaterina Derevianchenko, Tatiana Smirnova, Romanas Bulatovas, Theodorus Fransen, Lars Nooij (scribe)

Apologies: Bernhard Bauer, Siobhán Barrett

**Practicalities**
We once more (albeit unofficially) welcome new members to the fanclub: Ekaterina and Tatiana. Our minute reading practice is once again explained. Formal introductions will wait until next week, when we expect another new member to join us.

In the long run it is still the intention to upload these proceedings to the new ChronHib-website, but for the moment the minutes remain in that twilight realm where David's legendary articles reside.

***ŭ, ū* (§64-65)**
We skip these paragraphs as they contain no relevant synchronic information.

**'The true diphthongs'**
"The true diphthongs"; there is a difference in the layouts of the German and the English version of the grammar. The break between the discussion of the vowels and the diphthongs is more marked in the English version. "The true diphthongs" is not a very good title, however. Phonemically, these are the only diphthongs in Old Irish; the 'untrue diphthongs' are just orthographic combinations of a vowel and a glide vowel to the quality of the consonant.

"(*aí áe, oí óe, uí, áu áo, éu éo, íu, óu*)"; Thurneysen only gives the orthographic forms, not the phonological realisation. We would distinguish carefully between the latter and focus on the phonology in this chapter.

***aí, áe, oí, óe* (§66)**
These diphthongs should not be discussed together as these digraphs represent two distinct diphthongs in Old Irish, unless one is purely concerned with matters of orthography.

"In the manuscripts we find not merely *aí* interchangeable with *áe*, and *ói* with *óe* (the spelling with *-e* is probably modelled on Latin), but also constant fluctuation between *a* and *o* as the first letter of the diphthong." Which manuscripts is Thurneysen referring to here? As it stands, this is a misleading statement. Usually, Thurneysen's grammar is based on the glosses, but in the glosses there is no significant confusion between *ai* and *oi*. The confusion between the two arose in post-classical, or late Old Irish and is, for example, seen only very occasionally in Milan.

Moreover, the forms are not interchangeable, but rather follow chronological patterns. In the following, we focus on the diphthong *aí*, but presume that it will likely also hold for *oí*. The oldest form of the diphthong is <aí, ái, ai>, predominant in the earliest sources. We are not convinced that the forms in *-e* are necessarily influenced by Latin. Why did Latin orthography not influence the Irish from the start? At any rate, <áe> must have been introduced during the 8th century.

From the end of the 8th century <aí> and <áe> get confused and extended forms such as <aei> and for *oí* <oei> appear on occasion. <oein> for *óen* in the Cambrai Homily has been considered evidence for an intermittent stage of copying between the original and the present manuscript by Jürgen Uhlich. The phonetics cannot explain this particular spelling as the *-n* of *óen* is always non-palatal. Another unusual spelling for this word is <oien> in the Vienna Bede.

There are no clear parallels in the orthography of other contemporary languages on which these innovations might have been based. In Old Welsh one typically finds <ai> and <oi> for Middle Welsh <ae> and <oe>. In Latin the diphthong <oe> is rare and restricted to Greek loanwords, whereas the diphthong <ae> had turned into /ē/ at this stage (although the Irish would also have known about the earlier pronunciation from classical grammars).

It should also be noted that the same orthographical confusion occurs in the 'untrue diphthongs', e.g. *Maine* /man'e/ comes to be spelled as <maene> in the later 8th century. In the Stowe Missal, which was copied c. 800 AD, one finds *saile* 'spittle' written <saele> and *cailech* 'chalice' as <caelech>. In these cases, this must have been a purely orthographical matter.

Perhaps a phonetic argument can be made to explain the distinction. If one has forms like *Maíl* /maiˌl/, gen. *Maíle* /maiˌl'e/, one may in fact be dealing with two allophones of /aiˌ/. Possibly the conditioning factor depends on the quality of the following consonant, or on whether the syllable is open or closed.

As to the "constant fluctuation between *a* and *o* as the first letter of the diphthong", this is simply not correct for the Old Irish glosses. There is fluctuation, but it is not constant, nor necessarily random.

"Thus the Irish word for 'people' (collective) is variously written **ais, áes, ois óes**, sometimes in the same text." We would like to know which texts Thurneysen had in mind. Both forms (*aes, ois*) occur in the Poems of Blathmac, albeit on a very worn page of the manuscript, but Thurneysen did not know of the existence of this text. Otherwise, the occurrence of these forms does not appear to be random. In Würzburg one finds *ois*, in Milan *áes*. The difference is structural, but only for this one, particular word. Are we dealing with a case of dialect?

There are two words *áes* in the dictionary: 1 *áes* "people" and 2 *áes* "age". The latter has a Welsh cognate *oes*, which shows that the word must go back to something like **aiˌsto-* < PIE **h₂eiˌ-*. However, 1 *áes* has no known cognates and cannot be reconstructed with certainty. It seems possible that they were originally the same word, with a semantic development along the lines of 'age' > 'age group' > 'group of people' > 'folk, people'. However, it is also possible that 1 *áes* comes from < **oiˌs-* and that the two were later confused. At any rate, this word cannot serve as a good, general example, as it requires a special explanation of its own.

"In most cases, however, the etymologically correct letter is used, so that the confusion can hardly be very old (although **maidem** for **moídem** 'boasting' occurs as early as Wb. I. 17c14)." Here Thurneysen appears to contradict himself: on the one hand he says that the distribution is random, but then he claims it to be most often etymologically correct. He is of course correct in that the confusion cannot have been very old. <maidem> for *moídem* 'boasting' is not a very good example, however. In Milan one also finds <maíni> for *moíni* 'treasures' < **moiˌn-*. In this particular word, the vowel variation must be due to influence by the nasals. The same could be true for <maidem>. While at this, David wishes to officially retract everything he said last week about the etymology of *móin* 'bog, turf', Welsh *mawn*. A week ago, he still believed that there was also a Breton cognate, *meun*, Vannetais *man*. However, it has since

become apparent that these Breton words are very obscure and rare at best, thus rendering it uncertain whether we are dealing with an inherited, Proto-Celtic word, or a word which might also have been borrowed either from Welsh into Irish, or the other way around. At any rate, the other example with *á* (*már/mór*, Welsh *mawr*, Breton *meur*) is still good and there are also examples of the effect of a nasal on other vowels. It seems likely that the following consonant would have influenced the outcome in such cases (cf. GOI §80). All in all, <maidem> offers no evidence for a general confusion between *aí* and *oí*. Interestingly, however, this may constitute evidence for a difference in dialect between the Würzburg *Prima Manus* and the later glossators.

In the *Vita Columbae* the name of an island off the coast of Scotland shows an interchange between *aí* and *oí*: *Aíthche, Ouidchae*.

“The original vowel can often be determined by the aid of Britannic, where *oi* turned into *u*, but *ai* into *oi* (W. *oe*).” This remark can be left out of a synchronic grammar of Old Irish.

“It is impossible to decide what was the common phonetic value of the two diphthongs.” What ‘common diphthong’? There was no ‘common diphthong’ in Old Irish.

“In Modern Irish they have become a monophthong, the quality of which varies in different dialects.” E.g. in Munster Irish <ao> /ē/, in Connemara Irish <ao> /ī/; <aoi> is always /ī/. In personal names and placenames many exceptions are found – usually allowing for multiple explanations.

“In medial position the sound is often represented by *æ* in Mid. Ir. MSS.” What does Thurneysen mean by ‘medial’ here? In unstressed position the diphthong was always reduced to schwa. It should be noted that *oí* and *aí* > *é* did not fall together with old *é* in spelling at this stage. Old *é* always occurred after a palatal consonant, whereas old *oí* and *aí* always occurred after a non-palatal consonant. Therefore, it remained possible to keep the two separate in writing in word-internal position, even though they may well have been phonologically identical. The only position where one could find evidence for the phonological realisation is found in absolute anlaut and there one does indeed find *é* for old *oí* and *aí* in Middle and Modern Irish, e.g. Old Irish *oíbell* > *éibheall*, or *óen-* > *én-*. In Scottish Gaelic the pronunciation may have gone through a stage [ɯː], cf. Russian ы.

Thurneysen’s reference to a runic inscription on the Isle of Man is not very helpful. It is quite uncertain whether this reflects actual pronunciation, or just an orthographic approximation of written Irish. In general, these examples – being given without sources and including *very* late examples – do not add much.

In the German version Thurneysen argued that, since the diphthongs were never spelled as a single vowel in early Irish sources, they must still have been pronounced as diphthongs. However, this is not conclusive, as different explanations are possible (e.g. the one given above for the retention of a purely orthographic distinction between *oí* and *aí* > *é* and old *é*, even after the diphthongs had been monophthongised).

“Forms such as Ogam COLABOT, COLLABOTA beside COILLABOTAS representing the later gen. **Coílbad** are explained, perhaps correctly, by Pokorny (KZ. L. 49 ff.) as due to faulty spelling. His explanation of the interchange of *aí* and *ái*, e.g. in **faílid** ‘glad’ and **fáilte** ‘gladness’ (**faelid** SP., but **lán-ḟalid** Sg. 42ª7), is that before liquids + a consonant the diphthong lost its *I* (hence **fáilte**) and that parallel forms with *aí* and *á* then arose by levelling.” As this concerns writing <o> for the retained diphthong *oí* under

the accent, this is rather unexpected. Could we be dealing with a weird *ogam* spelling convention? Ziegler explained these spellings as reflecting a synchronic soundchange whereby the -i̯- disappears before certain lenited consonants. It may be noted that it has also been proposed that one of the rarely used *ogam* signs would originally have had the value /i̯/, but it is never attested with this value, even in the inscriptions where it would have been expected (but perhaps these inscriptions are late?).

The Old Norse name *Óláfr* was borrowed into Irish as *Amlaíb* (reflected in the modern Irish surname *McAuley*). Might the Irish have heard *aí* for Old Norse *á*? However, it should be considered what the Viking pronunciation of Old Norse *Óláfr* would have been when the name was borrowed into Irish (centuries before the Old Norse attestations). *Óláfr* comes from < **anu-laifar* and the Irish version presumably reflects this earlier stage.

Elliott suggests that the omission of the second element of the diphthong may represent the phonetic realisation of these sounds. The *ogam* spellings might show that the pronunciation of *oí* before *l* was not actually /oi̯/, but a reduced form, comparing this e.g. to the pronunciation of the English word 'time' in certain Southern American accents. If so, the sound law used to explain the *ogam* orthography need not have been reversed for Old Irish.

The examples given by Thurneysen of *faílid* 'glad' with *aí* and the derived form *fáilte* 'gladness' with *á* is a classic problem. But what is the evidence for the pronunciation of *fáilte* with a long *á* in Old Irish? In *Saltair na Rann*, *fáilte* rhymes with *sláinte*, confirming the *á* at least by that period. Moreover, if it had been *aí* in Old Irish, one would expect it to be /ɨː/ in Modern Irish. In fact, in one of the examples cited in eDIL it is found to rhyme with a diphthong in the modern language (*faoilte : sgaoilte*). Romanas raises the possibility that it was borrowed from or otherwise influenced by Latin *valentia* (or *volentia*), which might have muddled the picture.

At this stage it it also remarked that one sometimes finds *aoi* where one expects *úi* in Modern Irish, which reminds one a bit of Scottish Gaelic [ɯː]. David[1] cites an article by Tomás Ó Máille on the interchange between stressed *ú* and *é* in Modern Irish. Ó Máille compares this to English words, where apparently the same variation occurs and then offers Irish examples.[2] It is not a very helpful article. David cites it in one of his legendary (read: unpublished) articles, where he discusses the word *cóenna*, gl. *nucis* 'nutshell' (Karlsruhe Priscian). The word otherwise always means 'moss', e.g. *coinnich*, gl. *mossi* (Filargyrius glosses). The word is reflected in Modern Irish[3] as *caonach* (expected) and *cúnach*. In Scottish Gaelic it is *còinneach* with a long /ō/. This threefold distinction is certainly chaotic and no one apart from Ó Máille (and MacManus, who notes that it happens) appears to have written on it. Romanas remarks that the Scottish Gaelic evidence might actually reflect Irish *ú*, as Scottish Gaelic often changes *ò* to /ū/ under the influence of a nearby nasal.

Daniel asks whether this might reflect a case of different orthographical traditions leading to different pronunciations in various places over time? David argues that this is unlikely, as this kind of influence of the written form on the pronunciation of a word requires wide-spread literacy. Literacy in Irish must have been very, very low before the 20th century.

[1] David: "Bear with me for a moment, I might find something somewhere." Daniel: "Well, you probably will find something somewhere." David: "I always deliver... something."
[2] David: "Blu – blé, du – dé, Bruce – Bres, harroo – hurrey!"
[3] Ekatarina: "How Modern?" David: "Modern Modern."

As an example of something like this happening, Daniel offers the English example of the word ‘prophecy’, which can be both a noun or a verb in the Bible. Modern readers tend to have lost the distinction and pronounce both as if it were the noun (/i/, rather than /ai̯/).[4]

What about the word *Gaeilge* < *Goíd*-? In pre-reform spellings you do find *Gaoidhelge*, which hint at a diphthong. Scottish Gaelic *Gàidhlig* looks to be an older reduction to a monophthong, which certainly does not confirm to Pokorny’s aforementioned explanation. At any rate, Old Irish *Goídelc*, a British loanword (Welsh *Gwyddeleg*), is already an unexpected form in that it shows an unusual syncope. It should really have been *Goídlec*.[5]

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Pages read in this session: c. 1

[4] Romanas: “What is the spontaneous pronunciation of this verb?” Elliott: “It is not really a spontaneous verb.”
[5] Daniel: “How did you choose the spelling for the name of your book [*Sengoidelc*]?” David: “eDIL!”