

# Proceedings of the Thurneysen Fanclub: issue 12

Records of the discussions in the conference room on 09-03-2017

In attendance: David Stifter (chair), Siobhán Barrett, Chantal Kobel, Nicole Volmering, Bernhard Bauer (part-time scroller), Elliott Lash, Fangzhe Qiu, Lars Nooij (scribe)

Apologies: Michelle Doran, Anne Harrington, Deborah Hayden, Lára Ní Mhaoláin, Brian Ó Catháin

## Practicalities

The proceedings of the last four months (7-11) have now been posted online. A technical glitch used to make it cumbersome for David to actually upload any documents to academia.edu, which helps explain the delay.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, the recent update to the academia website seems to have solved the glitch.

Nicole Volmering was cordially welcomed to the circle. In other matters, David uttered the welcome words: “The ritual opening of the biscuits. There is great variety.” Next week there will be no meeting, as there is a study break at the university. The next meeting will therefore take place on 23 March.

## Orthography: voiced spirants (§29)

The general problems with the section on orthography are also found in this paragraph. It discusses a mixture of synchronic and diachronic orthography, scribal practices and historical linguistics. In other words, it is rather poorly organized and unfocused.

“Thus *g*, *d*, and *b* represent respectively the (Modern Greek) spirants  $\gamma$ ,  $\delta$ ,  $\beta$ ”; whilst essentially true, it should be made explicit that they *can* represent these spirants (as the graphemes have more than one value). We would also want to make the distinction between graphemes and phonemes more explicit. Additionally, we note that whereas Thurneysen uses the terms ‘mediae’ and ‘stops’ interchangeably, we should opt for either the one, or the other and use it consistently. Moreover, the reference to Greek is not necessarily all that helpful in this day and age. It would be better to make use of IPA.

“In addition, Irish had a spirant *m*, a nasal in the articulation of which the lips, instead of being closed, formed a narrow friction channel to produce a nasalized  $\beta$ ”; again, whilst essentially correct, this line is likely to be confusing for a reader who is unfamiliar with OIr. One should make a clear distinction between the grapheme <m> and the phoneme  $/\beta/$ .

There is a discussion on the best way to represent phonemes in the grammar. Traditionally, the aforementioned phoneme (IPA:  $/\beta/$ ) has been represented as  $/\tilde{v}/$  or  $/\mu/$  in the field of Celtic Studies. David has adopted the latter in his OIr. learner’s book, *Sengoidelc*. Given that the target audience of a reference grammar includes linguists from other fields and is not primarily aimed at students, we assume readers to have a basic understanding of IPA. As such, it seems best to simply be consistent and use IPA as the basis for transcribing phonemes in the grammar.

“This sound is not distinguished in writing from the pure nasal *m*”; this is not quite correct. The nasal  $/m/$  could also be written <mm>, whereas the fricative  $/\beta/$  was never written in that fashion. There is a brief discussion on whether  $/\tilde{\beta}/$  and  $/\beta/$  (written <m> and <b> respectively) were ever confused during the OIr. period. It would seem that they were phonetically distinct at least until the Classical Modern Irish period. All examples of variation in spelling, such as those involving *nóeb* > (Mod.Ir.) *naomh* and *memaid* > *mebaid* appear to represent actual phonetic changes, namely ass- and dissimilations in nasality.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, vowels are still treated differently before  $/\tilde{\beta}/$  and  $/\beta/$  in modern Scottish Gaelic. All this implies that  $/\tilde{\beta}/$  and  $/\beta/$  were well distinguished throughout the OIr. period.

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<sup>1</sup> Well, it is at least the pretence of an excuse... [DS].

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed account see David Stifter, ‘Contributions to Celtiberian Etymology II’, *Palaeohispanica* 6 (2006), 239–241; online: [https://www.academia.edu/19947122/Contributions\\_to\\_Celtiberian\\_Etymology\\_II](https://www.academia.edu/19947122/Contributions_to_Celtiberian_Etymology_II).

A further discussion, dealing with the words *beüs/beös* ‘still, yet’ and *bar/far/for* ‘yere’ ties into this subject. It is suggested that in these two words, the <b> might represent /f/, rather than /β/. However, there are alternative explanations. *Beüs/beös*, which later became *fós*, was a disyllabic, stressed word in OIr.<sup>3</sup> It seems possible that it was actually pronounced /bʲe.us/ in OIr., and was lenited to /βʲo:s/ in Middle Irish, taking part in the general initial lenition of adverbs. It may then have been reinterpreted as representing the nasalisation of a radical form *f-*, yielding Modern Irish *fós*. Scottish Gaelic *fhathast* went even further by leniting the *f-* anew. In the case of *bar* the word goes back to the 2pl. pronominal stem \**su-*. As such, these examples do not establish that <b> could be used to represent /f/ in OIr.

### Orthography: table of spirants (§30)

It is good practice to provide tables such as these, providing an overview of the way certain sounds might be spelled. Unfortunately, this is the only such table in this section of the grammar.

“The following **symbols** are...”; ‘letters’, ‘graphs’, ‘graphemes’ would be better than ‘symbols’ here.

Did OIr. have a voiced sibilant? In Proto-Celtic /z/ existed as an allophone of /s/ before *b, d, g*. This turned into /ð/ /\_d,g,b in (pre-)Irish. It would seem that Ogam Irish retained the /z/, given the existence of the inscription TASEGAGNI (CIIC 28) for *Tadgán*, where the <s> seems to represent that very phoneme, followed by an epenthetic vowel. However, as one never finds <s> for /ð/ in OIr. writing, the change from /z/ > /ð/ seems to have predated the OIr. period. One may therefore say that OIr. most likely did not have the phoneme /z/.

Were /p/ and /ð/ (<th> and <d> respectively) interdental in OIr.? Probably alveolar.

Were /f/ and /β/ (<f> and <ph>, and <b> respectively) labial, bilabial, or labiodental? Modern Irish /f/ is labiodental, but whether this tell us anything about the pronunciation of OIr. is at best uncertain. /β/ can be bilabial in Modern Irish. The exact OIr. realization is unknown. At any rate, the discussion of matters such as these belong in the section on phonology.

Could there have been voiceless nasal labial fricatives? \*Elliott makes a voiceless nasal labial stop\*<sup>4</sup>

“For variations in spelling see § 123 ff.”; this is not a very helpful reference, in particular as it refers to a chapter on historical phonology. It adds to the unstructured feel of this chapter.

“Like *m*, the letters *n, r, l* can each represent two sounds, **lenited** and **unlenited** (§ 135); the lenited sounds are, where necessary, denoted by *v, ρ, λ*.” Why did Thurneysen write this in small print? It is an important statement and merits proper attention.

Over the years various ways of representing the difference between lenited (lenis) and unlenited (fortis) *n, r* and *l* have been employed within the field. The treatment of *n* given in the table is representative

fortis	lenis
n:	n
nn	n
n	v
N	n

for all three. In this case we would not wish to make use of special IPA diacritics for fortis/lenis distinctions, as these would be too detailed/accurate for the purposes of a reference grammar of OIr. We prefer the set <n:> <n>, as David feels that capitals wreak havoc on the aesthetics of a line, and the use of Greek symbols can cause confusion (both for those who lack Greek, and when one gives a page a cursory glance as <v> and <ρ> can be

mistaken vor <v> and <ρ>).

<sup>3</sup> Its participation in alliterating lines with *b-* in SR 5046 and in *Caillech Bérra* 13 speaks for initial stress. Unfortunately, no instance of *beüs/beös* in rhyming position could be found. Perhaps it is a collocation of a form of the copula/substantive verb + *fós* ‘rest; stationary position’.

<sup>4</sup> Given the sheer difficulty of reproducing the experience in mere words, I but say: dear reader, you should have been there. There is no suggestion that Irish ever had this sound, in IPA [m̥].

### Orthography: voiced stops – rules and exceptions (§31)

“To represent medial and final **voiced stops** the tenuis symbols *c t p* are used instead of *g d b*”; for ‘medial’ we prefer ‘word-internal’ and for ‘symbols’ we again prefer ‘letters’, ‘graphs’, or ‘graphemes’.

“1. regularly after vowels, 2. optionally after consonants.” This leads to some discussion (see directly below), although both statements are essentially correct.

What about the sequence VDC (where V = vowel, D = voiced stop, C = consonant)? There is *·eprimm*; but compare this with *mac(c)rad*, an example for VTC (T = voiceless stop). And how about the sequence CDV? For example *orcun*, *orgun* – there seems to be no consistency in how this word is spelled. It should nonetheless be noted that despite this spelling ambiguity it is grammatically important whether the consonant is /t/, or /d/ (e.g. *·déntar* where the distinction is between sg. /d̪eːnt̪ər/ and pl. passive /d̪eːnd̪ər/; and *altae* which can be 3pl relative present /alde/ or 3sg passive preterite /alte/).

“An initial voiced stop is represented by the corresponding tenuis only in certain sandhi positions (where the final of the preceding word causes nasalization, § 236).” As this ties in with the broader theme of initial mutations/sandhi, this is out of place here and should be discussed elsewhere.

“For the origin of this usage see § 915”; this is also out of place in this section.

“Thus where Mod.Ir. writes...”; some of these examples are actually Scottish Gaelic. The examples given to illustrate the practice are not brilliant and there are inconsistencies in the way they are represented. Moreover, why compare OIr. orthography to that of Modern Irish (and only in regard to this specific feature)? This would be relevant in the section on phonology, as Modern Irish pronunciation is used to help establish that of OIr., but this is less relevant in describing orthography.

“On the other hand, we find constant fluctuation...”; this segment is quite alright.

A question is asked. Can <rd>, <rg> ever represent /rð/, /rɣ/? Yes, but never in word-final position (in contrast to <rb>). If it is word-internal such clusters have arisen through syncope, e.g. in the name *Fergus*. The spelling is therefore ambiguous in a similar fashion to that of *derb* /derβ/ and *orb* /orb/. The latter could also be spelled *orp*.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, whereas word-final <rp> is unambiguous for /rb/, <rc> is not as it can stand for /rg/ and /rk/, e.g. *derc*. We should explicitly mention these ambiguities and illustrate them by means of examples.

“There are, however, certain deviations from the above rule...”; that is an understatement. However, it should be stated clearly that what follows are mostly *very* rare exceptions and irregularities. The impression should not be created that these are common phenomena in standard orthography.

“(a) Very exceptionally, where two words are written together, the initial of the second is treated as though it were in medial position...”; correct, as such, although the word ‘word’<sup>6</sup> is considered to be ambiguous in and of itself. Moreover, it should be noted that in all of the examples offered here the first element is proclitic. One might wish to call it a proclitic particle. However, what is a ‘particle’, really? Is it not a vague, unspecific term that is useful all the same? Perhaps we should say that a particle is always unstressed. However, DIL calls *danó* and other such words particles, while they bear stress. Elliott uses the term ‘discourse markers’ or ‘sentence markers’ for them,<sup>7</sup> thus avoiding the vague word ‘particle’, which should be restricted to unstressed units.

“(b) The use of single *g d b* to represent stops in true medial position is rare, and may be attributed either to attempts at etymological spelling or to scribal errors...”; this is too speculative. It might simply

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<sup>5</sup> David: “You never find *derp* /derβ/ except in very late, very stupid manuscripts. It [= Old Irish orthography] is not a good system though. They should have asked me.” Elliott: “Jaffa cakes are good.” [DS: I protest. These quotes are out of context and shed an unfavourable light on the involved persons.]

<sup>6</sup> Fangzhe: “intuitive unit”.

<sup>7</sup> For more on this see Elliott Lash, ‘Subject Positions in Old and Middle Irish’, *Lingua* 148 (Sept 2014), 278–308.

be the reverse of the aforementioned ambiguity. Moreover, this is not always truly rare: in Milan the spelling of the /b/ of *ad-opair* are balanced (3 instances of <b> vs. 3 instances of <p>); in Würzburg, it is 2 <b> vs. 5 <p> in intervocalic position). A brief discussion arises on /combert/, which in many sources is found written <compert> and which ultimately ends up with an etymologically unwarranted /p/ (cf. ModIr. *coimpeart*), but this is a different story.

“Collection: Strachan, ZCP. IV. 54.” Noted, one should check this source.

“In archaic sources this spelling seems to be more frequent...”; *agaldemathacha · appellativa* (MS *āgal demathācha*; Milan, *Ars Ambrosiana*, L 22 sup.) Ó Cróinín also mentions this in his article on the earliest glosses. This may be a relic of two different and distinct, early orthographies. This should not be confined to small print, as it may prove to be a valid dating criterium. We need more examples. “...old gloss...”, this is very vague indeed.

“(c) In several manuscripts *gg dd bb* are occasionally written after vowels and consonants alike. This spelling is doubtless due to the fact that voiced consonants were originally geminated in all these positions...”; Thurneysen’s argument seems to reflect the supposition that unlenited word-internal, voiced stops were at some point reinterpreted as geminates. However, this seems to be an unnecessary claim.

There were certainly geminate stops at some point in the prehistory of Irish. In fact, the following distinctions must once have been present: d, (ǵd,) d:, t, t:. The second was marginal. Voiced geminates must for example have arisen out of \*-nt- clusters, e.g. *\*kantom > cét*, where the lack of lenition indicates that the stop did not simply merge with \*d after the cluster was resolved. Other examples include *\*biggo- > bec, beag* where the geminate is probably due to ‘affective gemination’, a sporadic process in the prehistory of Irish, cf. PC *\*mak<sup>u</sup>o- >> PrimIr. \*mak<sup>u</sup>k<sup>u</sup>o- > OIr. macc* (but British *mab*).

“...**con-ñ-delggaddar** ‘they are compared’...”; this Sg. gloss offers a very unusual spelling, indeed. Some of the other examples are also taken from the Priscian glosses; does this source have a predilection for this type of spelling?

Another example: *sacardd*. In this case such spellings indicate that the final stop was /d/, as in Latin *sacerdos*. In later Irish this was devoiced to *sagart* according to the rule *rd# > rt#* after an unstressed syllable.

The spelling of *abaith* may be influenced by the Latin. As a side-note: in the Annals one often finds *ab*. It is not certain whether this should be seen as the Latin abbreviation, or simply as due to the fact that the Annals are contained in late manuscript.

“(d) After vowels the etymological spellings *cg td pb* are occasionally found...”; does Thurneysen mean that the scribe recognized the words constituting a compound and altered the spelling to reflect those with ‘etymological spellings’ here?

“...because the infixed pronoun generally appears as *d...*”; this is an odd statement. Does Thurneysen mean that the class C neuter pronoun *-id* influenced the class B pronoun *-t* in *cotdicc*?

Some further unusual spellings are discussed, for example *deuladte* (*Enchiridion Augustini* (Berlin), ZCP 7, 485) for either /deulaþe/ or /deulaðe/ – the attested form looks like an odd mixture. We should add more unusual spellings to a section like this.

“...**nepbuith** ‘non-being’...”; this is perhaps not all that unusual; it could be *neph-buith*. As there is a clear morpheme boundary between the two elements it is not on the same level as the other examples.

[amended 10 March 2017]