Proceedings of the Thurneysen Fanclub: issue 39

Records of the discussions in the Conference Room on 15-05-2018

In attendance: David Stifter (chair), Fangzhe Qiu, Bernhard Bauer, Theodorus Fransen, Lars Nooij (scribe)

Apologies: Siobhán Barrett, Daniel Watson

Practicalities
We resume our meetings after a week's break.

Last proceedings
David has now had the opportunity to go through Elliott's extensive remarks on proceedings 37, mentioned last week, and we now go through them.

On the vocalism of the copula, Aaron Griffith has published an article in *Ériu* which explores the issue (he proposes that an unstressed vowel may be raised before a palatal -*s*).

On *cetu·* and *ceta·*, Aaron Griffith again has spoken at the 2016 ChronHib Workshop. Aaron has since submitted his paper for publication in the proceedings of said workshop. Also, *ocu·* should be included in this discussion.

As to the loss of interior vowels in extended pretonic sequences other than due to the effects of syncope, Elliott has referred to this as 'pretonic squishing'. He argues that one should not call it syncope, because it affects a different position in the word and he believes it to be a much later (late 8th or early 9th century) phenomenon, which occurs in Milan, but apparently not in Würzburg.

David wonders whether one could entertain the possibility that syncope might also have operated in pretonic syllables by counting backwards from the stressed syllable; i.e. in a sequence of four pretonic syllables before the stress, the third would then be liable to syncope, given that it would be the second syllable from the stress? The term 'retrograde syncope' is coined.

The question is raised whether 'pretonic squishing' should be considered a sound-change, like syncope, or a morphological change on the basis of analogy with other forms within the paradigms involved.

Elliott rightly points out that David has himself proposed a kind of allegro elision in the sequence *etir na*, where one does not find **etir inna. If one considers this underlying four-syllable sequence to have

been one form for the purposes of pronunciation, the third syllable has been lost, which goes against the rules of syncope.

It is asked what the place of *má* is within the verbal complex. In its positive form, *má* does not appear to be fully part of the (inner) verbal complex, since it does not trigger conjunct forms. As such, there must have been some sort of juncture between it and the verb, although *má* does not appear to have been stressed. The relative pronoun a^N is similar, although here we can at least see the nature of the juncture diachronically, as it originally belonged to the superordinate clause. The conjunction a^N 'when' should be included here as well. These elements seem to be part of some outer part of the verbal complex. Perhaps we should call them 'non-conjunct particles'?

The particle *maní·* is definitely part of the verbal complex, because *ní·* is. However, David does not hazard to decide whether *ní* is enclitic to *má*, or whether it is the other way around in *maní·*.

The question is raised where the stress might lie in a phrase like *ní ro chain* 'he cannot sing' when it is found in the glosses. This is an important question for the development of the verbal complex over time, but it is essentially unknown. Following McCone's system, there must be a development from an earlier *ní·rochain* to Middle Irish *níro·chain*, but it is unknown what the situation was at the time of the glosses. David hoped to find some clue to its status in the poems of Blathmac, where alliteration might at least potentially help decide the issue. Unfortunately, it has been too elsuive (thus far).

We wonder what triggered 'pretonic squishing'; does it occur after a set amount of preverbs? Or is not quite as systematic as that?

Elliott raises an interesting point in that differently squished forms appear to coexist, citing the form *arnarap_* from the Monastery of Tallaght and *annar_bu* from Milan. Both reduced a four-syllable-sequence to one of three, but did so in different ways. It is noted that in both of these cases, the *na* is kept. Might semantic salience play a part in all this? One could certainly imagine that the need to be clearly understood might then have affected the issue. Or might there have been a true optionality, bordering on arbitrariness for speakers of the language?

Elliott rightly points out that we did not discuss the form *comma·airic* 'so that it suits', cited by Thurneysen. David thinks that the underlying form must have been *co^H-imma-airic* with co^H, rather than *con-imma-airic* with co^N, with what then may well have been some form of 'pretonic squishing'. Elision does not offer a good alternative, given that this should affect the second rather than the first vowel and the *-h-* should have prevented it.

Elliott also convincingly argues that minim confusion is an unlikely explanation for all this, given the fact that it happens too often and too systematically.

We now turn to Elliott's remark on footnote two of proceedings 38, which he recently sent to David. This footnote is concerned with a very marginal point which was made about the idea that a hypothetical sequence /χl/ would be hard to pronounce. Elliott fiercely contests this point and appears to be in the right. David states that the main point during the last meeting was that there appears to have been some kind of neutralisation of the pronunciation of *l* in these positions in clusters, which removed any distinction between what was originally a geminate *ll* or a single *l*.

Joe Eska sent David an email – unrelated to our reading of Thurneysen – asking whether he had any ideas on when first graphic expression, such as *b(h)f-*, was given to nasalised *f*? We do not know; we presume it must have been at some point during the Early Modern Irish period, but do not know when exactly. Does it ever occur in Middle Irish? David will ask around about it. [DS: *Thes*. ii 365 has *ibfelaib* 'on feastdays' in an MS prior to 700 or early 8th century; Anders Ahlqvist cites stray forms from the 12th century in his chapter in *Stair na Gaeilge*.]

Theodorus now raises a point on the matter of the lenition of *l, n, r* and *s* and the remark made in last week's proceedings that David's definition of lenition as a development whereby stops became continuants by adding airflow to their pronunciation does not accord with the lenition of *l, n, r* and *s*. Was the lenition of *l, n, r* and *s* part of the same historical process as that of the stops? David answers that his definition does not cover all of the historical lenition. The *s* is a special case.[1] The 'lenition' of *l, n* and *r* is also rather different from that of the stops. David believes that lenited *l, n* and *r* actually continue the inherited pronunciation of these sounds, whereas the unlenited forms *ll, nn* and *rr* arose through reanalysis, out of a desire to have a lenited versus an unlenited form of these sounds after such pairs had arisen for the stops. He draws a diagram to help explain the matter:

strong	weak
b	VβV
l > ll	VlV

Once *b* had become *β* between vowels, the sound *l* between vowels was reinterpreted as being a lenited form and *l* in – say – initial position was fortified to *ll*. Before this, there was already an opposition between word-internal geminate and non-geminate *l*, the pronunciations of which appear to have been reinterpreted for the purpose of distinguishing between unlenited and lenited *l* respectively. The words *col < *kolo-* 'sin' and *coll < *kollo-* 'hazel' show the distinction inherited from Proto-Celtic between geminate and non-geminate *l*. There was no such inherited distinction in initial position (e.g. in a form like **letos > leth* 'side'). However, after phonemic lenition arose, speakers of Irish reinterpreted the distinction between geminate and non-geminate as one between lenited and unlenited forms and thereafter initial *l* was fortified to *ll* to reflect its unlenited status.

To further illustrate this, David turns to the letter *r*. It is quite certain that Old Irish had an apical *r*. The lenited *r* was probably a single flap *r*, whereas its unlenited counterpart was probably a strongly rolled *r*, as in Spanish. David believes that this distinction in the pronunciation was identical to that between geminate and non-geminate *r* in Proto-Celtic (as in **koro- > cor* 'putting, placing' vs. **korro- > corr* 'peaked, swelling'). This would then nicely show how the existing phonetic distinction between geminates and non-geminates was reanalysed in order to fashion an unlenited vs. a lenited form.

Loss of spirants and compensatory lengthening (§125)
This paragraph deals with purely diachronic matters.

Voice-levelling of spirants (§126)
"Where, as a result of syncope, spirants have come to stand before other consonants, there is a clearly marked tendency towards levelling in the sense that **voiceless spirants** become **voiced before voiced consonants**, and **voiced spirants** are **unvoiced before voiceless consonants**." This is, of course, a natural tendency, which ties in with what we have been discussing on neutralisation and the loss of certain distinctions.

"But the original sounds are often restored from other forms, and thus both spellings are found in the same word…" This begs the question whether we are dealing with an actual sound-law, or a broad tendency. Thurneysen clearly supposes that it was a sound-law, which might be counteracted by means of analogy, but we are hesitant to subscribe to this view. If it were a sound-law, we would expect that any sequence **-VthVrV-* would become *-VðrV-* automatically after syncope, but we reckon that there are likely to be forms (although we can at present not think of any examples) attested with *th* for which there is no parallel form from which to restore the *th*. Moreover, David believes that forms with *th* rather than *ð* are generally the more common. The example of *adramail < *φatro-samali-* is perhaps more complex still, given that the *r* could in theory have been devoiced through contact with the *s-* of *samail*.

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[1] It is briefly conjectured that there may have been an intermediate stage between *s* and *h*, but this does not seem necessary, given the sheer number of languages worldwide that have changed *s* into *h* – it seems a trivial development, in a sense.

In the case of *neb- / neph- < *ne-bʰu̯-o-* it is not clear which one would be the expected Proto-Celtic outcome. One should look up Jasanoff's proposal for the origin of the *f*-future to shed some light on the issue.

To sum up, there is clearly variation within these forms. It does seem, from Thurneysen's presentation of the material, that there is a distinction between Würzburg on the one hand and Milan and St. Gall on the other. The discussion needs exact figures and the inclusion of other sources before we can decide whether the distinction (if it exists) is one of time, dialect, or scribal practice. It may also be worthwhile to see what happens in the later language, to see where the development was headed.

The *Handbuch* largely has the same, but adds that this assimilation must postdate the development of an epenthetic vowel in words like *arathar* 'plough' < *arathr.

All in all, this paragraph has its place within a section on orthographic variation within the synchronic grammar of Old Irish, although it cannot be said to be very enlightening at present. Of course, such a chapter might become rather long if it aims to be comprehensive.

Reduction of *th/ðch* to *ch* (§127)
It is remarkable that this reduction takes place consistently within one word, *súachnid*. In *taidchor* < *to-aith-chor the appearance of a voiced *ð* is unexpected.

In general, this paragraph ties in with the broader issue of the simplification of clusters. In this case, the first element is deleted (and this appears to postdate the loss of the second element in certain three-consonant-clusters?). It is wondered whether the examples given are general, or exceptional within the attested material.

Bernhard reports that out of ten attestations of the word *taidbsiu* in St Gall, two appear without the *d*.

The loss of *ð/þ* does not seem to have affected the preceding vowel in any way (either by lengthening it, or by turning it into a diphthong). As such, it is not like the Modern Irish example of *Tadhg*, where the *ð* has become a *i̯*, turning the sequence into a diphthong. Nor is it like whatever exactly happened to turn *aidche* 'night' into *oíche* (which certainly also requires the shift in syllable peak).

Voicing of single spirants between unstressed vowels (§128)
"At first sight, **single spirants between unstressed vowels** do not appear to be governed by any rules, for voiceless and voiced spirants are often used indifferently in the same word or suffix…" This is even worse than the preceding!

"The fluctuation, however, is almost wholly confined to cases where the voiceless spirant is the original." This is interesting, at least.

Voicing of unvoiced spirants between unstressed vowels (§129)
"Original voiceless spirants between unstressed vowels are in process of becoming voiced, and have already in great measure attained that condition in the earliest manuscripts." This paragraph basically just continues on from the previous one.

The contrast between *ad·tluchedar* and *attlugud* offers a good illustration of the development; the *ch* is voiced when it stands between unstressed vowels, but remains unvoiced immediately after the stressed vowel.

This development means that both McCone's law and this conspire to give room for forms like *dílguda* through analogy with *attlugud* on the one hand and *dílgud* on the other.

What does Thurneysen mean by *-ach-* resisting the change? Is this true? At any rate, he does not actually discuss that sequence until the next paragraph, so we will take up the issue when we come to it.

We note that the word *tech* 'house' is odd, in that it should really be *teg*, which is attested a few times in particularly early sources.

It is interesting to note that the deponent verbs need to be one syllable further removed from the stress before this rule comes into play (i.e. one finds ·*cluinethar*, not **·*cluinedar*, even though the latter would be expected and *d*-forms do occur when the deponent root is longer). This must be due to the strong salience of the -*thar* ending on the basis of passive and deponent inflection, which must have allowed it to be preserved/restored. Presumably, the pronunciation was simply too weak for the inter-paradigmatic pressure to apply when the longer deponents ran into their fourth or fifth syllables, allowing the *th* to turn into *d*.

To sum up, it looks like the matter discussed in this and the preceding paragraph is underlyingly rule-governed, but with analogy, hypercorrection and reformation obscuring the pattern in the attested language.

Voicing of spirants in final position (§130)
Most of the matters described in this paragraph can now be better explained by means of McCone's law, which we discussed last week.

What Thurneysen says about palatal and non-palatal gutturals is basically correct; the inherited opposition between χ and γ is given up in final position. The word *tech* is a bit weird though, as we noted before, in that it has -*ch* rather than -*g*. This contrasts with words like *slóg* 'troop' and *mag* 'plain' which fundamentally retain their -*g* [but see below].

"Examples of *u*-quality are not numerous … In all these examples, however, -*g* is original." We do feel quite as certain about this matter and wonder about the etymologies of these examples.

All cases mentioned under 2. are explained by McCone's law, meaning that examples with -*th* are simply hypercorrect.

"For the labial spirants -*b* is almost invariably written, and represents not merely earlier *β* … but also an originally voiceless spirant *ph* (= *f*) … Exceptions are very rare: **oíph** 'appearance' Wb. and its compound **cammaif camaiph** 'still, however' …" David is writing about this matter in his legendary apple-article. He is especially concerned with the etymology of *oíph*.

"The above rules are often crossed, particularly in monosyllables, by levelling, the influence of other case-forms serving to restore the etymologically correct sound; e.g. **mag** 'field', influenced by gen. sg. nom. pl. **maige**, but **i-mmach** (i.e. *i^n mag*) 'out(wards)', where the connexion was less clearly felt." The contrast between *mag* and *i-mmach* is certainly interesting.

As to the examples of *led* for *leth* and *maid* for *maith*, these forms with -*d* are truly very rare indeed.

All in all, the material as presented here is not very enlightening and most of it is essentially explained by McCone's law, which Thurneysen could not, of course, have been aware of. The matter of whether words like *mag* and *tech* should regularly end in -*g* or -*ch* is an interesting problem, though.

Pages read in this session: 5,5.
Paragraphs discussed: §§125–130.