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Proceedings of the Thurneysen Fanclub: issue 40

Records of the discussions in the Conference Room on 21-05-2018

In attendance: David Stifter (chair), Fangzhe Qiu, Siobhán Barrett, Daniel Watson, Theodorus Fransen, Lars Nooij (scribe)

Apologies: Bernhard Bauer

Practicalities

Most unusually, very little of today's meeting was actually spent reading *GOI*. Instead, the discussion centred on an e-mail exchange between Theodorus Fransen, Ruairí Ó hUiginn, Elaine Uí Dhonnchadha and David Stifter. Therefore it was suggested that this constituted (at least in part) the first meeting of the (Theodorus) Fransen Fanclub. And indeed, the email exchange is examined almost as closely as we usually do Thurneysen's words.

The Fransen Fanclub: issue 1

The e-mails are concerned with the nature of the Old Irish verbal system and offer a welcome detour after a long spell slogging through the weary wastes of (problematic) variation in Old Irish orthography.

Theodorus essentially asked where one might look to find a list of Old Irish verbal roots and their verbal classes. Moreover, he wondered what the balance between weak and strong verbs is – how many are there of each, both in an absolute sense and relative to another?

Ruairí suggested looking at Holger Pedersen's 1909–13 *Vergleichende keltische Grammatik*.[1] This work does indeed contain a handy list in its index and includes 204 verbal roots.[2] Fundamentally these are chiefly strong verbs; Pedersen left out mostly anything that was 'regular' and did not require explanation. More precisely, he included the old primary verbs, which tend to be strong verbs in Old Irish, and therefore left out most weak verbs, given that they were secondary verbs from the Indo-European perspective.[3]

[1] Henry Lewis' 1937 translation (*A Concise Comparative Celtic Grammar*) is, unfortunately, more of an abbreviated than an updated version of the same.

[2] Lewis' version contains 150 roots, which appear to have been chosen in a somewhat arbitrary fashion. As such, the German original is the better option for our purposes.

[3] Primary verbs generally go back to Proto-Indo-European and were usually already defined as verbal roots at that early stage. They essentially constitute a closed class, which allows for a comprehensive treatment of their Old Irish reflexes (e.g. in Pedersen, but also in McCone's *Early Irish Verb* and in Schumacher's *Primärverben*). The secondary verbs are derived verbs, usually denominal.

As such, Pedersen's treatment is not comprehensive and it is also some 100 years (or 70 for the abridged version) out of date, which means that its contents needs to be checked against more recent scholarship. Our understanding of the complexities of the Old Irish verbal system – while still imperfect – has simply improved over time.

David dislikes using the concept of regular vs. irregular in the context of Irish verbs. He argues that the distinction is largely meaningless in Old Irish. In a sense, most verbs are regular, but with devilishly complex rules governing their surface forms, which may give them the appearance of irregularity. The truly 'irregular' verbs are those that are suppletive and supply part of their paradigms from entirely unrelated roots. The other verbs are essentially regular and the remaining irregularities can usually be captured in a number of broad types: spread of palatalisation, wrong syncope (caused by intraparadigmatic analogy), the position of *ro*, unexpected tense and mood assignment (probably due to analogy) and in general the ongoing simplification of the verbal system over time (compound > simple, and strong > weak).

Returning to the previous point, it is suggested that there are also lists of secondary verbs, centred on the specific suffixes by means of which they were derived, e.g. *-aig-*.

In synchronic Old Irish, we believe that the chief (or only) way to derive new verbs is by means of the suffix *-aig-*. Up to the Early Old Irish period, there was also the option of deriving verbs by creating W1 (*-ā*) verbs, e.g. *síl* 'seed' > *sílaid* 'to sow'. The classic example is *marb* 'dead' > *marbaid* 'to make dead, to kill'. Presumably, this broke down when the *ā*-ending was reduced to *schwa*, rendering it obscure. That the option was retained into Early Old Irish is shown by the evidence of Latin loanwords, irrespective of their Latin inflection, being adopted as W1-verbs, e.g. *pridchaid* 'to preach' < *predicāre*, *scríbaid* 'to write' < *scribere*.

Another early, but rarer option was to derive a verb using the W2-ending (*ī*), e.g. *cit* in the Philargyrius glosses, which appears to be a 2sg. imperative form of a verb *citid* 'to grant, give, allow', derived from *cet* 'permission'.

A minor source of new weak verbs would also be the reinterpretation of originally strong verbs as weak. Examples of these are *léicid*, which should be an S3-verb and which probably got reinterpreted as a W2-verb when it lost its typical S3 present-stem *-n-*. Another example is *seichithir*, which is W2, but should really be S1. An example of a W1-verb with such an origin is *scaraid*, which derives from a PIE primary root and should really be strong in Old Irish. Interestingly, there are also originally weak verbs which take on strong inflection in certain tenses, e.g. *caraid* < **kar-* 'friend', which has the strong future *cechraid*.

In general, collections of secondary verbs are relatively rare and it would indeed be difficult to treat them comprehensively, given that there must be hundreds and thousands of them. Speakers of the language would have been adding to them over time, as they felt the need to coin new terms. For example, the early Christians borrowed *fírián* 'just, righteous' from Britishas a native term for Latin *iustus*, and then coined the word *fíriánaigidir* 'to justify' from that. Esther Le Mair has collected a good number of them in her *Corpus of Secondary Verbs*, however.

McCone's index to the second version of his *Early Irish Verb* is useful, but unfortunately does not include the verb classes, which would have been helpful. It is, again, not exhaustive, as he derived his material chiefly from the glosses. Moreover, his main interest was composition and inflection, rather than collecting verbs.[4]

David's vocabulary list in *Sengoidelc* is of course not exhaustive, but it does at least give the stem-classes. David recently noticed that it does contain a consistent flaw: he has listed all *-igidir*-verbs as

[4] At this stage, David notes that there are very few Celtic words starting with *n-*, prompting him to say: "Celts didn't like roots starting with *n-*, for whatever reason." As the saying goes, *de gustibus non disputandum est!*

W2b, but has now decided that they must be W2a. He is convinced that he was convinced that he had a good reason for classifying them as W2b at the time, but he cannot now recall what it was. In any case, he is convinced now that he was wrong then.

Essentially, all this comes down to the conclusion that there simply is no handy list available of verbal roots along with their classes and the preverbs they can combine with in Old Irish. There is a lot of material out there, in various sources, but no one has so far brought it together. It is noted though that Trudy Rossiter's thesis has a list of compounded verbs with their preverbs.

Returning to the matter of irregular verbs, there are of course some genuinely problematic verbs out there. One of these is the verb *ad·andai* 'to kindle', which is a W2-verb. However, its 3sg. pret. is *ad·and*, not ***ad·aind* with the expected palatalisation.[5]

Another complicating matter is the fact that *DIL* also contains mistakes. In some cases, the headword in *DIL* gives a form ending in a consonant for compound verbs, implying that the verb is strong, whereas the verb is actually demonstrably weak.

Other sources which one may consult, apart from the aforementioned works, are an article by Dagmar Wodtko in IJDL, which traces the verbal system from Proto-Indo-European to Irish.[6] There is also Elvira Veselinovic' *Suppletion im irischen Verb*. And of course there is Stefan Schumacher's *Die keltischen Primärverben*, which unfortunately does not include the causatives.[7]

In conclusion, it is noted that it is quite interesting in itself that the Old Irish verbal system was fundamentally highly regular on the deep level, but not on the surface level. It is also noted that irregular features like 'wrong syncope' are unpredictable and must be related to the salience of specific forms within the paradigms of specific verbs. As such, it is indeed quite a challenge to capture the full complexity of the Old Irish verbal system.

Lenition of *s* (§131)
With that we turn back to Thurneysen for the final stretch of the meeting. We are now at the start of the section on the lenition of the continuants. The title is fine.

It is a bit odd that he gives the examples before saying what it is that they are examples of. Moreover, the word 'disappears' is a bit confusing, given that in the case of *s* > *h*, the *s* did actually leave a trace in the forms cited.

David would like to introduce the term *provection*, which is used in British grammar, to indicate the type of devoicing found in these examples. Elliott counters that this does not cover many of the Irish examples, given that the *s* is often before rather than after the consonant thus devoiced in these cases. As such, one should also speak of something like *antevection*, or as Daniel suggested *prevection*. David concedes that "Elliott is right, as always", and suggests *ambivection*, but certainly seems rather *ambi*valent and *vexed* by this turn of events. "Progressive and regressive assimilation" is indeed actually accurate, but is also rather a mouthful, whereas *provection* is such a nice word.[8]

[5] David: "There is something wrong about this verb."
[6] In this work it is observed that there is a reduction in the amount of strong roots in the language as it turns into Old Irish. The semantic load is increasingly shifted onto preverbs as composition increases in importance. As such, fewer verbal roots remain in Old Irish, relative to Proto-Indo-European. By the Modern Irish period, composition has been given up again and the verbs have become simple once more, even though the historically underlying roots can often no longer be recognised. Striking examples: **μe̯id-* > *in·fét* > *inis* and **gab-* > *fo·gaib* > *faigh*.
[7] At this stage David offers some nice English examples of causatives and their base forms: *fall* vs. *fell*, *lie* vs. *lay*, and *drink* vs. *drench*.
[8] [DS: Yes, it is.]

The example of *míathamle* ‘magnificence’ actually has provection and is unusual in that compounds with *samail* generally behave as if the *s/h* wasn’t there. There is probably some chronological dimension to the matter. Elliott suggests that it is also worth considering whether compounding with preverbs behaves differently from compounding does for nouns.

It is wondered whether Thurneysen was correct in comparing *comṡuidigud* ‘composition’ with *déserc* ‘charity’. The first seems very artificial and looks like a calque on Latin *composition*, whereas *déserc* may well be somewhat older and have a place within the spoken language. Then again, *comṡuidigud* takes part in the much more productive system of verbal compounding, whereas *déserc* forms part of the rarer process of nominal compounding.

Next meeting
Due to the scribe’s absence there will be no meeting next Monday, nor on the Monday after, given that the latter is a bank holiday. David will send out an e-mail to see whether we can have the meeting at an alternative moment.[9]

Pages read in this session: 0,5.
Paragraphs discussed: §§131.

[9] [And we are still waiting…]