

Palatalization in Old Irish Deponent and Passive Endings

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1. INTRODUCTION

A historical explanation of the system of verbal endings in Old Irish is much more difficult than in the case of other ancient Indo-European languages. This is due mainly to the loss of the majority of old final syllables which occurred in the prehistory of the language. But the consonant palatalization caused by the former existence of the following front vowels, as well as the vowel umlaut, permits us to determine the shape of the lost elements fairly specifically, although uncertainties still remain. Thus, we can reconstruct, for example, the vowels of the lost endings of thematic type nouns such as *fer* [f'er] "man (nom. sg.)", *fir* [f'ir] "id. (gen. sg.)", and *fuir* [f'ur] "id. (dat. sg.)" as **o*, **i* (or **e*), and **u*, respectively solely on the basis of internal evidence.¹⁾ With the help of comparative method, **wir-os*, **wir-ī*, and **wir-ū* are safely posited as the ascendants of the above Old Irish forms; compare these with the corresponding Latin forms, *vir*, *virī*, and *virō*.

Palatalization also plays an important role in distinguishing synchronic grammatical categories. The following table includes a partial paradigm of the deponent and passive of Thurneysen's class A II represented by *suidigidir* "he places":²⁾

	Absolute	Conjunct
Deponent		
sg. 1		- <i>suidigur</i>
2	<i>suidigther</i>	- <i>suidigther</i>
3	<i>suidigidir</i>	- <i>suidigedar</i>
pl. 1	<i>suidigmir</i>	- <i>suidigmer</i>
2	<i>suidigthe</i>	- <i>suidigid</i>
3	<i>suidigitir</i>	- <i>suidigetar</i>

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- 1) Orthographically, *i* and *e* were used in Old Irish to represent the crucial distinction between palatalized and non-palatalized consonants. To put it briefly, palatalized consonants are marked by the preceeding *i* or the following *e* or *i*. This technique was, however, never systematically employed by scribes.
- 2) Cf. Thurneysen (1975: 365ff.). The distinction between absolute and conjunct forms is fundamental to the grammar of Old Irish. Conjunct forms occur when they are preceded by preverbs or verbal particles, *ro-* and *no-*, whereas absolute forms are confined to simple verbs in positions other than the above-mentioned. The origin of this opposition will be discussed in the following section. The passive has a special form only for the third person. For the first and second persons the 3 sg. conjunct form is used with the relevant infixed pronouns; e.g., 1 sg. *no-m-suidigther* "I am placed", 2 sg. *no-t-suidigther* "you are placed", 1 pl. *no-n-suidigther* "we are placed", 2 pl. *no-b-suidigther* "you (pl.) are placed". This sharp differentiation in form and function between deponent and passive is one of the features peculiar to Old Irish.

Passive	sg. 3	<i>suidigthir</i>	<i>-suidigther</i>
	pl. 3	<i>suidigtir</i>	<i>-suidigter</i>

As is unambiguously observed in the above table, the absolute forms of the third person, whether deponent or passive, are regularly characterized by the palatalized final *-r*. The corresponding conjunct endings, on the other hand, never show palatalization. This unique feature is not restricted to the present of A II class, though relevant examples are not numerous; e.g., conjunct 3 sg. deponent (A I) *-labrathar* "he speaks", conjunct 3 pl. *-labratar*; absolute 3 sg. passive (A I) *mórt(h)aí* "he is magnified", conjunct 3 sg. *-mórt(h)aí*, absolute 3 pl., *mórt(a)í*, *mórt(a)ítir*, conjunct 3 pl. *-mórtar*, *-mórtatar*; absolute 3 sg. passive (B I) *ber(a)í* "he is carried", conjunct 3 sg. *-berar*, absolute 3 pl. *bert(a)í*, conjunct 3 pl. *-bertar*. Likewise, the same distribution of palatalized *-r* and neutral *-r* is found in other tenses and moods; e.g., *s*-preterite, absolute 3 sg. deponent of the *eissisí* "he besought", conjunct 3 sg. *-suidigestar* "he placed", absolute 3 pl. deponent *tuilsitir* "they slept", conjunct 3 pl. *-suidigsetar*; *s*-subjunctive present, absolute 3 sg. passive *gess(a)í* "it may be prayed", conjunct 3 sg. *-gessar*, conjunct 3 pl. *-gessatar*. A number of suggestions have been made regarding the origin of this opposition between palatalized *-r* of the third person absolute endings and the neutral *-r* in the corresponding conjunct endings. In this study an effort will be made to offer the most straightforward historical explanation to this problem by providing a new piece of evidence from the standpoint of comparative grammar. Before re-examining previous suggestions regarding our present problem itself, we will first give the gist of the theories put forward concerning the origin of the Old Irish absolute and conjunct verbal endings.³⁾

2. THEORIES OF THE ORIGIN OF THE OLD IRISH ABSOLUTE AND CONJUNCT VERBAL INFLECTIONS

The system of verbal endings of Old Irish is dominated by the opposition of the so-called "absolute" and "conjunct". The verb takes conjunct endings when preceded by a preverb; otherwise, it takes absolute endings (e.g., absolute 3 sg. active present *beirid* "he carries", 3 pl. *berait* vs. conjunct 3 sg. active present *as-beir* "he says", 3 pl. *as-berat*). According to the traditional view proposed by, among others, Meid (1963), Watkins (1963) and Watkins (1969: chapter 12), absolute endings come from PIE primary endings 3 sg. **-ti*, 3 pl. **-nti* (e.g., *beirid*, *berait* < **bhereti*, **bheronti*) and conjunct endings from PIE secondary endings **-t*, **-nt* (e.g., *as-beir*, *as-berat* < **eks-bheret*, **eks-bheront*), with reduction of final elements.

This view was criticized by Cowgill (1975a) for several reasons. The most serious objection to it was given from a functional point of view. Proto-Indo-European

3) A journal of this kind focused exclusively on phonetics and phonology would not be the place to discuss Indo-European origins of the Celtic verbal system. However, they are connected with the present problem in an inseparable fashion.

distinction of "primary" and "secondary" endings is semantically drawn; i.e., opposition between primary tense and secondary tense. The Old Irish contrast between absolute and conjunct endings, however, is controlled purely by positional factors, not by functional factors.⁴⁾ In order to account for this functional discrepancy, Meid, *op. cit.*, and Watkins, *op. cit.*, were obliged to assume that the distinction between primary and secondary endings is quite late, and that in the prehistory of Celtic the verb came to have absolute inflection in the stylistically marked initial position of the sentence.

An alternative theory by Cowgill himself is that both absolute and conjunct endings come from Indo-European primary as well as secondary endings, with a particle **(e)s* added to first elements of clauses following the so-called Wackernagel's Law (**-es* after consonant and **-s* after vowel).⁵⁾ An early apocope of **-i* is responsible for the merger of primary endings with secondary in non-initial positions of sentences. According to this theory, absolute and conjunct forms of present and preterite are derived in the following fashion:⁶⁾

			loss of final syllable		<i>i</i> -apocope
			↓		↓
Absolute	3 sg. present	<i>beirid</i> "he carries"	<		<i>*bereti-s</i>
	3 sg. preterite	<i>birt</i>	<		<i>*ber(s)t-es</i>
Conjunct	3 sg. present	<i>as-beir</i> "he said"	<	<i>*eks-es-beret</i>	< <i>*eks-es-bereti</i>
	3 sg. preterite	<i>as-bert</i>	<		<i>*eks-es-ber(s)t</i>

It is, of course, not the case that there are no apparent difficulties with this theory. The most notable one is that the particle **-es*, which plays a crucial role in Cowgill's framework, has no sure etymology. This weakness was seriously discussed by McCone (1982, 1985). After all, the origin of absolute and conjunct endings in Old Irish is a problem which still awaits complete agreement among scholars.

3. EARLIER ANALYSES

R. Thurneysen, in his authoritative work of Old Irish (1975: 367), suggested two possible sources for the palatalization of the absolute endings of deponent, 3 sg. *-thir* (*-dir*),⁷⁾ 3 pl. *-tir*. One is the mediopassive primary endings with final diphthong like Gk. *-ται*, *-vται* (cf. Skt. 3 pl. *-re* < **-rai*); in Celtic this diphthong would have

4) It should be recalled that in the preceding section we observed that even preterites take both absolute and conjunct endings just as presents do.

5) Cf. Cowgill (1975a, 1975b, 1985). Kortlandt (1979) and McCone (1982, 1985) accepted the objection raised against the traditional view and showed a partial support for Cowgill's view.

6) Of course, other processes such as lenition and palatalization are necessary to derive actual forms.

7) *-th-* is quite liable to be voiced to *-d-* when it is separated from the stress by at least two other syllables; cf. Thurneysen (1975: 82).

become $\bar{i}$. The other is a possibility that the palatal quality was taken over from the active forms. Among these two analyses the latter will be seriously entertained in the next section. The first one, according to which the palatalization of final $-r$ is due to the following $*-\bar{i}$, presupposes that the final diphthong $*-ai$ came to be attached to $*-r$ in the prehistory of Old Irish. The transfer of $*-ai$ to $*-r$ is, however, not motivated at all and, in fact, this view is wrong in the light of our present understanding of IE verbal endings. There were two totally distinct r 's in Proto-Indo-European. The r included in Skt. 3 pl. $-re$ ($< *-ro + i$) is a part of the personal endings, while the final $-r$ observed in Old Irish deponent and passive is a particle not related with the ending; cf. Watkins (1969; 194ff.) and Cowgill (1983: 108). Accordingly Skt. 3 pl. $-re$ cannot be equated with Old Irish palatalized final $-r$.

A surprisingly simple explanation was made by Jasanoff (1977), who posits $*-ri$ as PIE preform and argues that the palatalized $-r$ of the Old Irish absolute is a phonologically regular outcome. According to his view, reconstructing $*-ri$ in Proto-Indo-European does not cause any problems to the other major languages where the r -element is used in the mediopassive paradigm. Latin final $-r$ in 3 sg. $-tur$ and 3 pl. $-ntur$ can be taken as due to loss of the final i of $*-ri$. Tocharian A and B 3 sg. $-tär$ and 3 pl. $-ntär$ can also continue $*-ri$ as well as $*-r$. Hittite $-ri$, which was traditionally considered to be optionally attached to present mediopassive endings, is a lineal descendant of PIE $*-ri$ if Jasanoff's claim is right. But the historical status of the Hittite $-ri$ was recently examined in a systematic manner with significant implications for the reconstruction of the PIE verbal system and the development of that system throughout the family. Through an exhaustive analysis of a chronologically shifted text collection Yoshida (1990) showed that $-ri$ was originally proper to the accented 3 sg. ending $*-á$. It is then argued that PIE present mediopassives were characterized by $*-r$ at least in the third person and that this final $*-r$ dropped after unaccented syllables in Proto-Anatolian; subsequently, the deictic $*-i$ of the present active was transferred to the $*-r$ which survived after accented endings. The $-ri$ thus created progressively spread in the post-Anatolian period. This assertion would lead Jasanoff to lose a primary source of the palatalized quality of final $-r$ in Old Irish because it cannot be ascribed to the alleged PIE $*-ri$.

The two attempts reviewed in this section, both of which sought an explanation from phonological grounds, are now taken inadequate. Thus, explanations, if any, would probably be given from a morphological viewpoint.

4. A MORPHOLOGICAL SOLUTION

In ancient Indo-European languages, such as Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, and Hittite, a single mediopassive category is observed for both deponent and passive uses. In Celtic languages represented by Old Irish, however, the deponent and passive have undergone a differentiation in forms. From a synchronic point of view, the stem vowel preceding the third person endings is always retained in the deponent conjugation

(3 sg. absolute *-V-dir*, *-V-thir*, conjunct *-V-dar*, *-V-thar*, 3 pl. absolute *-V-tir*, conjunct *-V-tar*), while it is lacking in the passive (3 sg. absolute *-C-thir*, conjunct *-C-ther*, 3 pl. absolute *-C-tir*, conjunct *-C-ter*); cf. the paradigm shown in section 1.⁸⁾ This unique feature suggests that the third person deponent endings are characterized by the syncopated endings, 3 sg. **(V-)t̪* and 3 pl. **(V-)nt̪*, in contrast to the passive, where the original endings, 3 sg. **(C-)tor* and 3 pl. **(C-)ntor*, are inherited.⁹⁾ It should again be noted that the opposition between palatalized *-r* of absolute endings and neutral *-r* of conjunct endings is consistently observed both in deponent and passive forms.

As I mentioned earlier, Thurneysen suggested a possibility that the palatal quality of final *-r* of absolute endings was carried over from the corresponding primary active endings.¹⁰⁾ If the distribution of palatalized *-r* and unpalatalized *-r* in deponents and passives was a late creation on the model of the active, we would expect that the palatalized quality of active absolute endings and unpalatalized quality of active conjunct endings are systematically distinguished. This is, however, not the case. Shown in the following are third person present active forms of major verb classes:

		Absolute	Conjunct
A I	3 sg.	<i>mór(a)id</i> , <i>-(a)ith</i> "magnifies"	<i>-móra</i>
	3 pl.	<i>mór(a)it</i>	<i>-mórat</i>
A II	3 sg.	<i>lécid</i> , <i>-ith</i> "leaves"	<i>-léci</i>
	3 pl.	<i>lécit</i>	<i>-lécet</i>
B I	3 sg.	<i>berid</i> , <i>-ith</i> "bears"	<i>-beir</i>
	3 pl.	<i>ber(a)it</i>	<i>-berat</i>
B II	3 sg.	<i>gaibid</i> "takes"	<i>-gaib</i>
	3 pl.	<i>gaibit</i>	<i>-gaibet</i>
B IV	3 sg.	<i>benaid</i> "hews"	<i>-ben</i>
	3 pl.	<i>benait</i>	<i>-benat</i>

8) Old Irish words have been altered by the syncope of interior vowels. It took place in every word which, after the loss of final syllables, still preserved more than two syllables. Normally the vowel of the second syllable was elided, and in a word of five or more syllables the vowel of the fourth syllable also; cf. Thurneysen (1975: 67). However, the stem vowel preceding the ending is never elided in the Old Irish deponent, while it is usually absent in the passive; i.e., deponent **V-(n)t̪* and passive **C-(n)tor*. This idiosyncrasy is due to morphologically motivated generalization.

9) Jasanoff (1977: 162) considers that the two types of endings both go back to Proto-Indo-European and he takes the endings, 3 sg. **-tri* and 3 pl. **-ntri* (in his reconstruction), either as syncopated rapid speech variants of original **-tori* and **-ntori* or as morphologically remodelled from them.

There is further evidence showing that the original mediopassive endings, 3 sg. **-tor* and 3 pl. **-ntor*, are preserved intact in the Old Irish passive. Attention should be paid to *a*-presents (A I class) such as 3 sg. *mórt(h)aír* and 3 pl. *mórt(a)ir*, where occasional spellings 3 sg. *-thair* and 3 pl. *-tair* side by side with 3 sg. *-thir* and 3 pl. *-tir* unmistakably point to the existence of the vowel **o* in the endings. Likewise in B I class such as 3 sg. *ber(a)ir* and 3 pl. *bert(a)ir*, which go back to **-or* and **-ntor*, respectively. In *i*-presents (A II class) like *léicthir*, on the other hand, the spellings 3 sg. *-thair* and 3 pl. *-tair* are not attested because of the original stem final **-i-*; **C'-i-tor' → *C'-i-thor' → *C'-thor' → *C'-th'or' → C-thir*.

10) A similar view is expressed by Cowgill (1975: 42).

It is true that the presence of palatalization in absolute endings and the lack of it in conjunct endings are consistent in the 3 pl. endings, i.e., absolute [-d'] and conjunct [-d], but the situation is different in the 3 sg., where the original ending was entirely lost in conjunct forms. Since the distinction between absolute and conjunct forms cannot entirely be attributed to the difference between endings with palatal and neutral qualities synchronically, we are naturally led to assume that analogical influence from the active endings to the *-r* endings occurred quite early in the prehistory of Old Irish. That is to say, the *hic et nunc* particle **-i* characteristic of active primary endings must have spread to the third person *-r* endings before the date when the formal opposition of primary and secondary endings (**-ti*, **-nti* vs. **-t*, **-nt*) was completely lost at latest.

There is a piece of phonological evidence in favor of the view that the transfer of deictic **-i* from the active to the third person *-r* endings occurred very early. In Tocharian PIE mediopassive endings developed into A [B] 1 sg. *-mār* [-mar], 2 sg. *-tār* [-tar], 3 sg. *-tār* [-tār] and 3 pl. *-ntār* [-ntār]. Among them, the first and second singular endings go back to Common Tocharian **-mār* and **-tār* (<PIE **-[m]h₂er* and **-th₂er*), respectively. On the other hand, the preforms of the third person endings can only be PIE 3 sg. **-tr* and 3 pl. **-ntr*, which are identical to the forms ancestral to Old Irish deponent conjunct 3 sg. *-dar* and 3 pl. *-tar*. This perfect correspondence between Tocharian and Old Irish third person *-r* endings strongly suggests that 3 sg. **-tr* and 3 pl. **-ntr* had already been created in the Proto-Indo-European period. Thanks to Stempel (1987: 25ff.), who showed that the only possible outcome of PIE **-C₁#* in Old Irish is *-Car#*,¹¹⁾ it turns out that the spread of **-i* antedates the phonological change of **-C₁#* to *-Car#*; otherwise, we would expect absolute 3 sg. *-dair* (<**-tar-i*←**-tar*<**-tr*) and 3 pl. *-tair* (<**-ntar-i*←**-ntar*<**-ntr*). If we assume that **-i* was attached directly to 3 sg. **-tr* and 3 pl. **-ntr*, the actual absolute 3 sg. ending *-dir* (<**-t'r'*<**-t'r'i*<**-tr-i*) and 3 pl. ending *-tir* (<**-n't'r'*<**-n't'r'i*<**-ntr-i*) are derived without any difficulties. Since Proto-Indo-European syllabic resonants are only preserved in Sanskrit among Indo-European historical documents, the conclusion is inescapable that the extension of **-i* from the active to the *-r* of absolute endings in pre-Irish is of remarkable antiquity. Comparative evidence which supports our conclusion is found in Anatolian, where, as I have shown elsewhere (Yoshida, *op. cit.*), the deictic **-i* was likewise analogically transferred from the active paradigm to the mediopassive **-r* in the Proto-Anatolian period. This **-i* of the newly created **-ri*, which typologically still remains faithfully in Hittite and partially in Palaic and Cuneiform Luvian, will account for the palatalized final *-r* of Old Irish deponent and passive absolute endings.¹²⁾

11) This refutes G. Schmidt's derivation of Celtic **-(n)tri* from **-(n)tr*, cf. G. Schmidt (1977: 105).

12) The discussions in this section were made within a framework of the traditional view which takes absolute and conjunct endings from primary and secondary endings, respectively. If we adopt Cowgill's framework, the palatalization of final *-r* of absolute endings is attributed to the particle **-es*. Even in this case, it is still necessary to assume that the attachment of **-(e)s* to the absolute forms occurred earlier than the phonological change **-C₁#* to *-Car#*.

5. EPILOGUE

We will conclude this study by summarizing historical developments of absolute and conjunct endings of Old Irish deponent and passive schematically. In late Proto-Indo-European coexisted two sets of *-r* endings, **-(n)tor* and **-(n)tr*, among which the former were generalized in Latin and Hittite while the latter in Tocharian. In Celtic the variants **-(n)tor* and **-(n)tr* came to be specialized in different functions: the former were exclusively employed for passive and the latter for deponent. The subsequent developments of each category are illustrated below:

Absolute	deponent	3 sg. <i>*-tr</i>	→ <i>*-tri</i>	> <i>*-t'r'i</i>	> <i>*-t'r'</i>	> <i>-dir, -thir</i>
		3 pl. <i>*-ntr</i>	→ <i>*-ntri</i>	> <i>*-n't'r'i</i>	> <i>*-n't'r'</i>	> <i>-tir</i>
	passive	3 sg. <i>*-tor</i>	→ <i>*-tori</i>	> <i>*-tor'i</i>	> <i>*-tor'</i>	> <i>-th(a)ir, -d(a)ir</i>
		3 pl. <i>*-ntor</i>	→ <i>*-ntori</i>	> <i>*-ntor'i</i>	> <i>*-ntor'</i>	> <i>-t(a)ir</i>
Conjunct	deponent	3 sg. <i>*-tr</i>		> <i>*-tar</i>		> <i>-dar, -thar</i>
		3 pl. <i>*-ntr</i>		> <i>*-ntar</i>		> <i>-tar</i>
	passive	3 sg. <i>*-tor</i>				> <i>-ther, -thar</i>
		3 pl. <i>*-ntor</i>				> <i>-ter, -tar</i>

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