

Conclusion

The chief object of this work has been to comprehensively describe the most crucial and conspicuous phenomena occurring in the phonological system of Old Irish and to show that they are by and large a reflection of the prehistoric developments of both single lexical items and close syntactic groups. It has been argued that the majority of vocalic and consonantal alternations, which must be regarded as morphophonological from the synchronic perspective, are to a great extent determined by the past phonological changes.

At the outset, word-initial mutations in Old Irish were presented and approached in terms of changes in the element make-up. We observed that the pattern of lenition in obstruents involved the delinking of one phonological prime, while that of nasalization entailed either the addition or the subtraction of one element. Given that the contexts for initial mutations of consonants were no longer present in Old Irish, we investigated the prehistoric causes of the Old Irish mutations and found that the ancient phonological contexts in closely connected syntactic groups brought about a wide range of changes in the shape of word-initial consonants. For example, the historical leniting and non-leniting environments triggered the word-initial mutations on a large scale. In terms of the element make-up, the obstruents lost one prime, mostly (?), due to lenition. As regards the non-mutating contexts, these were also shown as ones which were responsible for alterations in the element structure of certain segments. The origin of the Old Irish [f] and tense sonorants can be accounted for phonologically only under the assumption that the so-called no-mutation contexts were in fact mutating. In particular, the segment [f] first developed from the glide [w] exclusively in non-mutating *h*-prefixing contexts. It was argued that the element (U) constituting this glide and the prime (H) which took part in *h*-prefixation merged to produce the structure (U, H), which was realized as [f]. Later on, [f] replaced [w] in all no-mutation contexts, but this replacement was not phonologically motivated. It was also argued that the tense sonorants first appeared in *h*-prefixing contexts as well. It was proposed that, although there was no element merger in this case, the previously lax sonorants utilized the skeletal position which was earlier occupied by the prefixing [h]. Thus, gemination (or double linking) provided the sonorants with tenseness. Afterwards, the tense sonorants also surfaced in all no-mutation environments, but their occurrence in many contexts must be viewed as analogical to that in *h*-prefixing sites. It was postulated that in such cases the tense resonants are not doubly linked but headed.

The subsequent morphological reductions in the words which preceded the mutated consonants resulted in further phonological adjustments. For example, the definite articles lost their final consonantal segments only in front of obstruents and tense sonorants. On the other hand, those deleting article-final segments were reinterpreted as word-beginnings before both the lax resonants and vowels. Moreover, we found that the formal division into historical mutating and non-mutating contexts was frequently ignored by the phonology of the pre-Old Irish system because the adjustments which took place in both these environments often produced identical results in the Old Irish close syntactic groups. A good case in point is the phenomenon of *t*-prefixation, which occurred in both historical leniting and non-mutating contexts.

As regards nasalization, this prehistoric process manifested itself in the addition of the element (N/L) to the original make-up of obstruents. Under the assumption that nasality and voicing are represented by the same prime (N/L), we argued that when this element was added to the structure of stops which already contained the element responsible for voicelessness (H), the two opposing primes were neutralized and removed from the structure. As a result, the Old Irish system perceived the process of mutation as either the addition or the suppression of one phonological prime.

Then we turned to the prehistoric word-initial consonant clusters with a view to determining why some of them were affected by lenition, while others resisted this process. It was argued that the consonant sequences in which stops underwent weakening to the corresponding fricatives were not involved in interonset governing relations, while the clusters which were immune to lenition constituted interonset governing domains. Furthermore, while attempting to find the reason why voiced stop+sonorant clusters, e.g. [gl], underwent lenition a few centuries before voiceless stop+sonorant sequences, e.g. [kl], we first hypothesized that all the stop+sonorant sequences displayed rightward interonset governing domains (RIO). We also argued that the government-licensing power of the prehistoric nuclei was gradually diminishing and the first lenition affected consonant sequences in which the complexity ratio was shallow. In particular, shallow complexity clusters, e.g. [gl], ceased to be RIO relations much earlier than steep complexity groups, e.g. [kl]. Subsequently, the constantly waning government-licensing potential of nuclei led to the decomposition of all RIO domains. A side effect of this analysis was a proposition that the very process of consonant lenition originated not in single consonants, e.g. [g], but in shallow complexity clusters, e.g. [gl]. This hypothesis, which is *nolens volens* revolutionary, was based on the internal assumption of GP that empty nuclei must be weaker (government)-licensors than full vowels and that lenition should primarily affect those consonants which were followed by weak licensing nuclear points.

Another important issue connected with Old Irish consonant clusters was the different behaviour of seemingly identical word-final sequences both in the subsequent development and in the mediaeval verse. It was initially assumed that all sonorant+stop sequences were leftward interonset relations (LIO) in Primitive Irish and that some of them ceased to be such governing domains late in that period. In particular, it was proposed that the phenomena of vowel epenthesis in sonorant+heterorganic voiced stop clusters, e.g. [lg] → [ləg], and the simplification of homorganic sonorant+voiced stop groups, e.g. [Ld] → [L], took place before Old Irish and that these processes were a consequence of the constantly diminishing government-licensing power of nuclei. This analysis made it possible to pinpoint the precise moment when the rules of the verse made most sense phonologically. Then we analyzed the triconsonantal sequences in Old Irish and concluded that most of them reflected the patterns observed both word-initially and finally. As regards the sequences which violated the well-established patterns, it was argued that word-internal morphological boundaries should be recognized in these cases.

Finally, the inventory of short vowels and the phenomena of vocalic alternations in Old Irish were examined. Also in this case a purely synchronic analysis turned out to be flawed since contexts for alternation were no longer available. An inspection of diachronic developments revealed that the Primitive Irish vowels obeyed the principle of vowel height harmony. This harmony was determined by the presence/absence of the element (A) in the nuclei of a given lexical item. This prime had to be either linked to two consecutive nuclear slots or absent altogether. As regards the cases where this prime remained under only one nucleus, we argued that (A) was headed there. The double linking or headedness was viewed as similar to that observed in the tense Irish sonorants. The parallel behaviour of certain elements in the structure of both resonants and vowels indicates that this pattern was not unique in the system.

An equally important issue turned out to be a discussion about the consonant qualities in Old Irish. Having analyzed both traditional and modern approaches to the number and impact of these qualities on the phonological system, we concluded that Old Irish had only palatalized (slender) and non-palatalized (broad) consonants. As regards the alleged necessity to render contrast among different paradigmatic cases of the same lexical items, either by the employment of more than two consonant qualities or by the recognition of short diphthongs, it was argued that no contrast was displayed unless the palatalized vs. non-palatalized consonant distinction allowed to mark it. This analysis may have consequences for the treatment of consonant qualities and the synchronically triggered vocalic alternations in Modern Irish.

To summarize, this work has sought to demonstrate that purely synchronic analyses of phonological systems may sometimes turn out to be insufficient, superficial or imprecise because they concentrate on what is only apparently phonological. This seems to be the case with respect to Old Irish because the workings of that system were to a great extent conditioned by truly phonological phenomena which occurred many centuries before and there are very few issues in this language which can be synchronically approached from a phonological perspective.