

## Raising of \*e to \*i before \*μ in Old Irish

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### 0. The Basic Proposal

\*eμ did not raise to \*iμ before high vowels in Pre-Irish.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Background: General Conditions for Raising and Lowering

Position here is that of McCone (1996: 109ff), though see Schrijver (1995: 50-2) for a slightly different argument on lowering:

- mid-vowels raise to high vowels before following high vowels, but:<sup>2</sup>
  - raising does not take place over a voiceless stop: *roithid* *roithi* “sets in motion” < \**rotīti*
  - raising is blocked by many clusters (a function of the individual consonants involved?): *neirt* “of strength” < \**nerī*
- high-vowels lower to mid-vowels before \**ǎ* and \**ǒ*
  - independent of intervening consonants
  - single exception: *find* “white” < \**uindos* / \**uindā*

### 2. Phonetics of the non-raising.

Sonorants in general do not block raising (cf. *·biur* “I carry” < \**berū*), but \**m* does not pattern like other sonorants in several ways:

- syllabic resonants develop differently before \**m* than before \**n*, \**r* and \**l* (cf. *cruim* “worm” < \**k<sup>h</sup>rmi-* vs. MW *gwassarnu* “strew” < \**str<sup>h</sup>na-*)
- MacNeill’s Law: final \**r*, \**n*, and \**l* delenited at the end of unstressed syllables after \**r*, \**l*, \**n*, and unlenited \**m* (cf. *lán* “full” beside *comlann* “complete”).

It seems that \**m* (or \**μ*) sometimes patterns separately from other resonants. Thus, raising need not occur before \**μ* just because it occurs before other resonants (and \**m*, cf. *timme* “heat” < \**tepsmijā*).

Restrictions due to nasalized vowels:

- Old Irish had nasalized vowels (Schrijver 1993)
- vowels before \**μ* were nasalized (cf. OIr PN *Amlaib* from Pre-ON \**Anulaib̄ar*, ON *Áleifr*)<sup>3</sup>.
- nasalized vowels have fewer distinctions than oral vowels; it is possible that no distinction of mid and high nasalized vowels existed in Pre-Old Irish.

Conclusion: lack of raising of \**i* to \**e* before \**μ* is phonetically defensible.

<sup>1</sup> This idea has already been mentioned in print as a personal communication from me (Stifter 2008: 283). Here I intend to expand on those brief remarks.

<sup>2</sup> It is possible that the raising was limited to accented vowels, but the evidence is not convincing.

<sup>3</sup> I would like to thank Stefan Schumacher for pointing this example out to me.

3. Evidence for raising before  $*\mu$ : *nem* “heaven”, *umae* “bronze”, *cruimther* “priest”

a)		Sg	Pl	Sg	Pl
	nom	<i>nem</i> “heaven”	<i>nime</i>	<i>glenn</i> “valley”	<i>glinne</i>
	acc	<i>nem</i>	<i>nime</i>	<i>glenn</i>	<i>glinne</i>
	gen	<i>nime</i>	<i>nime</i>	<i>glinne</i>	<i>glinne</i>
	dat	<i>nim</i>	<i>nimib</i>	<i>glinn</i>	<i>glinnib</i>

Raising seems to have affected all cases outside the nom/acc sg:

- gen sg *nime* <  $*nimehah$  <  $*nimehah$  < Pre-OIr  $*nimehoh$  < IC  $*nemesos$

But four-part analogy is also capable of generating the form:

- nom / acc sg *glenn* : gen sg *glinne* :: nom / acc sg *nem* : X; where X = *nime*.

A phonological account is preferable to an analogical one, but the relative costs of each must be weighed. The analogical account offered here cannot be ruled out.

b) The case for raising  $*o\mu$  to  $*u\mu$  is solid: *umae* “bronze” <  $*omijo-$  (cf. W *effydd*)

		Sg	Pl
	nom	<i>umae</i>	<i>umai</i>
	acc	<i>umae</i>	<i>umu</i>
	gen	<i>umai</i>	<i>umae</i>
	dat	<i>umu</i>	<i>umaib</i>

That  $*o$  raised to  $*u$  does not prove that  $*e$  raised to  $*i$ .

c) *cruimther* “priest”, Ogam QRIMITIR (borrowed from L *presbyter*) is inconclusive.

- when was the  $*s$  in *presbyter* lost?
- when was  $*\mu$  introduced?
- what was the vowel in the first syllable?

Jackson’s (1953: 128) British-Latin  $*premiter$  as the source of the Irish is speculative:

- OW *premiter* is attested only in Cormac’s Glossary.

In the end, *cruimther* provides no clear evidence for the raising of  $*e\mu$  to  $*i\mu$ .

Summary: there is no solid evidence for raising of  $*e\mu$  to  $*i\mu$  in Old Irish.<sup>4</sup>

4. Evidence against raising before  $*\mu$

The primary evidence against raising is the following: *leime* “impotence, folly”, *neimi* “poisons”, *do eim* “you (sg) protect”, and *reimir* “as thick as”.

*leime* (f  $\bar{i}\bar{a}$ ) “impotence, folly”: derived from *lem* ( $o/\bar{a}$ ) “soft, weak”; there is no raising and no possibility for intraparadigmatic introduction of  $*e$ . Analogical pressure from *lem* is possible, but examples like *oll* ( $o/\bar{a}$ ) “great” vs. *uille* (f  $\bar{i}\bar{a}$ ) “greatness” and *tromm* ( $o/\bar{a}$ ) “heavy” vs. *trummae* (f  $\bar{i}\bar{a}$ ) “heaviness” show that such alternations were tolerated.

<sup>4</sup> It is intriguing that in both *nem* and *cruimther*, the  $\mu$  preceded by raising comes from  $*b$ . Whether more than chance lies behind this fact is uncertain.

*neimi*, nom pl (Sg 139<sup>b</sup>6, Thes ii 301.2) to *neim* (nt *n*): the word was originally an *n*-stem (Wb 7<sup>c</sup>1 *nemnech* “poisonous”), but all forms in sg outside the genitive are ambiguous with *i*-stem forms: nom / acc / dat *neim*. This ambiguity allowed the creation of the *i*-stem nom pl *neimi*. All this assumes that *neim* could be seen as a possible *i*-stem form. That is, if raising had taken place before \* $\mu$ , *neim* would not have been analyzable as an *i*-stem and *neimi* could not have been created.

*don·eim·ni* “You (sg) protect us”(Ml 110<sup>d</sup>9): the lack of raising here is not so easily dismissed, despite the possibility that it was analogically levelled after 3sg *do·eim*. The verb belongs to the simple thematic class of BI verbs, like *beirid*, *·beir* (1sg *biru*, *·biur*, 2sg *biri*, *·bir*), where the effects of raising are in general retained. It would thus be surprising if 2sg \**do·im* were remade to *do·eim*, homophonous with the 3sg, but other 2sg forms like *·bir* were not.<sup>5</sup>

*reimir* “as thick as” equative to *remor*: this form is old, coming from \**remrī*, gen sg of \**remro* > *remor* “thick” (Bergin 1946). Analogy is possible on the basis of the positive *remor*, but the irregular equatives as a class, and this form particularly, are quite archaic (Jasanoff 1990: 187). It is significant that the form shows no raising. Similar arguments attach to the comparative *reime*.

Summary: None of the cited forms shows beyond doubt that there was no raising before \* $\mu$ , but the evidence is suggestive, and there is no reliable counter-evidence.

Do further considerations make the assumption of non-raising before \* $\mu$  attractive enough to adopt, even given the lack of solid examples of the (non-) sound change?

##### 5. Further considerations: raising of unaccented \**es* to \**is*?

PRO: McCone (1996: 99-100, 2006: 110-15) argues that the change was Insular Celtic:

- *·bir* “you (sg) carry” < \**birih* < \**berih* < \**beris* < \**berisi* < \**beresi*
- *it* “you (sg) are” = *i* + *t* (cf. *latt* “with you” = *la* + *t*) < \**ih* < \**is* < \**isi* < \**esi*
- *nime* “heaven (nom pl)” < \**niueha* < \**niuiha* < \**neiuiha* < \**neiuisa* < \**neuesasa*

*coin* “dogs (nom pl)” < \**kwones* shows that the raising took place only when \**es* was prevocalic, which shows that the raising took place before the IC apocope of final \**i*.

CONTRA: Schumacher (2004: 138-53) argues that the raising never took place:

- OIr *temel* “darkness”, OW *timuil*, MW *tywyll*, MB *teffoal* < IC \**temeselo-*
- *at* “you (sg) are” < \**e* + \**t* < \**eh* < \**es* < \**esi*

dat sg *glinn* (Pre-Irish \**glendes*) must be analogical to other forms, like the gen sg and the entire plural (e.g. gen *glinne*).

2sg *·bir* is due to analogy : 1sg pret *·biurt* : 2sg *·birt* :: 1sg pres *·biur* : X, where X = *·bir*. The ending of the 2sg absolute *biri* is an import from other verb classes.

<sup>5</sup> Schumacher (2004: 145ff) explains the raising in the 2sg of *beirid*, *·beir* differently. See below.

ANALYSIS: both explanations are problematic.

- The British Celtic data (< \**teμēlo-* < \**temeselo-*) clearly show that the raising of \**es* to \**is* was not Insular Celtic.
- McCone's revised rule, that \**es* does not raise before \**e*, is *ad hoc*.
- Schumacher's explanation of 2sg *biri*, *·bir* is not self-evident.

COMPROMISE: assume that the raising of \**eμ* to \**iμ* did not take place, and that the raising of unaccented \**es* to \**is* did (both occurred in Pre-Irish, not Insular Celtic).

- OIr *temel* and MW *tywyll*, MB *teffoal* are regular from IC \**temeselo-* (via Pre-Old Irish \**teμiselo-* and Proto-British \**teμēlo-*)
- 2sg copula *it* "you are" is regular; see McCone (2006: 112-13) for a response to Schumacher's (2004: 139-40) assertion that 2sg *at* is regular
- For 2sg *biri*, *·bir*, the absolute develops phonologically: \**beresi* > \**berisi* > \**birihi* > *biri*. The conjunct copied the root vowel of the absolute.
- dat sg *glinn* is analogical to gen sg *glinne* (pace McCone 2006: 113-14)

The advantage of the present explanation:

- OIr *temel* and its British cognates are explained phonologically, without an exception to the raising rule.
- The 2sg abs of thematic verbs is phonologically regular.
- The analogies are straightforward (2sg conjunct, dat sg of *s*-stems).

## 6. Conclusions

It has been argued here that the raising of unstressed \**es* to \**is* can explain numerous forms in Old Irish. To assume the Pre-Old Irish sound change, however, raising of \**eμ* to \**iμ* must be denied; otherwise OIr *temel* < \**temeselo-* cannot be explained straightforwardly. Though the evidence against the raising of \**eμ* to \**iμ* is not unequivocal, assuming the (non-)sound change has a number of benefits: OIr *temel* "darkness", 2sgs *biri* "you carry" and *it* "you are", and the oblique cases of *s*-stems (outside the dat sg) fall out under this analysis. Relatively simple analogies can then account for *s*-stem dative singulars like *nim* and *glinn*, as well as 2sg *·bir* "you carry".

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