

## The Old Irish deponent suffixless preterite\*

Aaron Griffith  
Institut für Sprachwissenschaft, Universität Wien

The Old Irish verbal system is unique among the Indo-European languages in that it shows a distinction between passive and deponent endings throughout the grammar. In most languages, the endings are the same (cf. Latin deponent *sequ-itur* “follows” and passive *mitt-itur* “is sent”), but Old Irish systematically differentiates the two: *do·cuirethar* “he places” vs. *do·cuirther* “it is placed.” While most of the facts concerning the prehistory of the deponents in Celtic have been satisfactorily explained, a few unsolved issues remain, the examination of which will be the focus of this paper.

Before discussing specifics, however, a brief review of the descriptive facts of the Old Irish verbal system will be useful. Every Old Irish verb has in each tense and mood category a full set of endings associated with active meaning. These endings can be either the normal active endings or they can be deponent. In addition to the full set of active forms, there are two passive forms, a 3sg and a 3pl, which have two further variants, depending on whether or not they are preceded by one of the conjunct particles. To express other persons of the passive, the appropriate object pronoun of that person is infixed into the 3sg passive form of the verb (preceded in simple verbs by an empty preverb *no*). A partial paradigm of the present indicative of a non-deponent weak verb *caraid* “loves” and of deponent weak verb *suidigidir* “places” is given in Table 1.

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	Non-deponent Paradigm		Deponent Paradigm	
	Absolute	Conjunct	Absolute	Conjunct
Active				
1sg	<i>caraimm</i>	<i>·caraimm</i>	<i>suidigiur</i>	<i>·suidigiur</i>
2sg	<i>carai</i>	<i>·carai</i>	<i>suidigther</i>	<i>·suidigther</i>
3sg	<i>caraid</i>	<i>·cara</i>	<i>suidigidir</i>	<i>·suidigedar</i>
1pl	<i>carmai</i>	<i>·caram</i>	<i>suidigmir</i>	<i>·suidigmer</i>
2pl	<i>carthae</i>	<i>·caraid</i>	<i>suidigthe</i>	<i>·suidigid</i>
3pl	<i>carait</i>	<i>·carat</i>	<i>suidigitir</i>	<i>·suidigetar</i>
Passive				
1sg	-----	<i>nom·charthar</i>	-----	<i>nom·suidigther</i>
2sg	-----	<i>not·charthar</i>	-----	<i>not·suidigther</i>
3sg	<i>carthair</i>	<i>carthar</i>	<i>suidigthir</i>	<i>·suidigther</i>
1pl	-----	<i>non·carthar</i>	-----	<i>non·suidigther</i>
2pl	-----	<i>nob·carthar</i>	-----	<i>nob·suidigther</i>
3pl	<i>cartair</i>	<i>cartar</i>	<i>suidigtir</i>	<i>·suidigter</i>

Table 1: Present paradigms for non-deponent and deponent verbs

In an important study published over 25 years ago, Warren Cowgill (1983; hereafter “Cowgill”) addressed the prehistory of the passive and deponent verbal endings in Insular Celtic. He discussed the endings and showed how they can generally be traced directly back to Indo-European material. For the first and second persons, he showed that the Old Irish endings continue Indo-European middle endings plus the particle *-r*. The inherited Indo-European third person middle endings *\*(n)tor*, however, seem to show up as passives, and the attested Old Irish deponent 3rd person endings are of some other origin, which Cowgill could not

explain. In addition, he could not offer a fully satisfactory explanation of the deponent suffixless preterite endings.

It is striking that, although the 3rd person deponent endings bear a number of similarities to the corresponding passive forms, the two groups of forms are not identical. A major difference is that the passives allow syncope of the vowel before the ending while the deponents do not. Except in the preterite, where the passive is formed from a separate stem, this pattern of differentiation via presence or lack of syncope is repeated throughout the other tenses and moods: future 3sg deponent *·comálnabadar* MI 46<sup>c</sup>20 “he will fulfill” vs. passive *comallaibther* MI 89<sup>b</sup>11 “that it will be fulfilled;” subjunctive 3sg deponent *du·mmenathar* MI 49<sup>a</sup>15 “he may think” vs. passive *ara·mmentar (féid)* MI 61<sup>a</sup>11 “that he may be honored.”

While the lack of syncope in the 3rd person deponents is one major feature of the ending, it is not the only one. Also important is the difference between the deponent 3rd person absolute ending *-thir*, where both consonants are palatalized, and the conjunct ending *-thar*, where both consonants are neutral. A final problem concerns the *-st-* of the *s*-preterite 3rd singular *·foilsigestar* “he manifested.” Since intervocalic *-st-* yielded *-ss-* in Irish (cf. *ad·cess* “was seen” < *\*ad-k<sup>h</sup>is-to-*), the *-st-* of the *s*-preterite must have some other origin, i.e. it was either not intervocalic or it resulted from syncope. Any explanation of the deponent endings must be able to offer solutions to all these problems.

Both McCone (2006: 138-46) and Jasanoff (1997) have sought to address these issues in proposing solutions to the problem posed by the deponent endings. McCone does not address Jasanoff’s approach at all, while Jasanoff (152) critiques an older version of McCone’s idea (1982: 6; 1997: 76-7). While I ultimately adopt

Jasanoff's idea, it is necessary to discuss both scholar's proposals.

Before turning to the competing proposals, however, a word must be said about the absolute / conjunct distinction. The debate, begun in its modern form with Cowgill (1975; building on Boling 1972), lay dormant for a time in the mid-80s to mid-90s, but it has recently shown signs of revival.<sup>1</sup> I intend to avoid entering into that discussion as much as possible, since I have nothing substantive to add to the debate. I do believe, however, that the position taken here on the form of the deponent endings is defensible regardless of whether one accepts the Cowgill particle (in its original or modified form) or ascribes rather to McCone's view.<sup>2</sup>

### **McCone's account of the deponent endings**

Having said that I will avoid the origins of the absolute / conjunct distinction, it must be admitted that it is difficult to discuss McCone's account of the deponent endings separately from his theory on the absolute / conjunct distinction and the origin of verb-initial syntax in Insular Celtic. Immediately below I will attempt to show that his explanation of the deponent endings is incorrect. Later, I will argue that this need not rule out his theory of absolute / conjunct endings as a whole, since the deponent endings are still explicable under his theory.

McCone has consistently argued against any explanation of the absolute / conjunct distinction that involves the use of a "Cowgill" particle, and he seeks rather

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<sup>1</sup> See Schumacher (2004: 90-114) for a compact treatment of the problem and a complete list of literature to the time of publication. McCone (2006) continues the debate in a wide-ranging monograph. Further references to these two works will be given simply as "Schumacher" and "McCone."

<sup>2</sup> I do not consider Kortlandt's views here (1979, 1994), as they have been ably critiqued by McCone (132-6 and 1982: 18-23).

to connect the distinction with the rise of verb-initial position in Insular Celtic (74-96; Chapters 3 and 5). Specifically, McCone assumes that the verb-initial position was required in Insular Celtic when Wackernagel clitics were used (69ff). Thus, while the verb might stand in some other position when there were no enclitics in the sentence, the presence of an enclitic pinned the verb to the initial position. For the deponents specifically, he argues for one further twist: deponent verbs were forced to adopt non-deponent inflection when followed by a clitic. These assumptions yield the following Insular Celtic pattern (using the verb *midithir* “judges” for expository purposes; # represents the sentence boundary and *E* an enclitic):

# * <i>mediti-E</i> ...#	Deponent verb with a clitic
# * <i>meditor</i> ...#	Deponent verb without a clitic (initial variant)
#... * <i>meditor</i> ...#	Deponent verb without a clitic (non-initial variant)

Table 2: the Insular Celtic distribution of 3sg present deponent verb forms

He argues that \**meditor* in initial position was eventually replaced by \**meditir* via analogy: 1sg \**medyū-E*: \**medyūr* :: \**mediti-E*: X, where X = \**meditir*. The three-way distinction of initial \**meditir*, non-initial \**meditor*, initial with enclitic \**mediti-E* eventually surfaced as Old Irish *midithir*, *·midethar* “he judges”, *mitti* “he judges it”.

McCone claims that the expected syncope of the third person deponents endings (\**meditir*, \**meditor* would normally give \**mittir*, \**mitter*) did not occur because of the exploitation of divergent syncope patterns in order to maximally distinguish passive and deponent forms. This process can best be illustrated by referring to the large class of denominal deponents in *-aig-*. The class represents verbs of the form \**X-sagī-* “be an X seeker,” as in *cathaigidir* “fights” < “is a fight-seeker,”

which is formed as if were a denominative verb from a compound *\*catu-sago-* “a fight-seeker” (see Joseph 1985 on the origin of the class). The denominal deponents were already productive in Insular Celtic and became wildly so in Old Irish. Because the verbs were either penta- or hexasyllabic (and sometimes as long as heptasyllabic), they showed two different syncope patterns, depending on whether the verb had an even or odd number of syllables. McCone assumes that speakers of pre-Old Irish used both syncope patterns in order to systematically differentiate deponent forms from passive forms, although both descended from the same Insular Celtic preform *\*-tor*. He thus assumes that the following situation occurred in Pre-Old Irish:

*\*·uogaro-sagī-tor > ·fograigethar<sup>3</sup> “sounds, is sounded”*  
*\*·crutu-sagī-tor > ·cruthaigther “forms, is formed”*

Table 3: McCone’s undifferentiated present deponent / passive

Based on the inconvenient homonymy of active and passive in these deponent verbs, McCone claims that the syncopated type *·cruthaigther* was generalized as a passive on the model of other syncopated passives in *-ther* (cf. *·léicther* “is left”). A (phonologically irregular) syncopated *·fograigther* with passive meaning was then analogically created. The non-syncopated *·fograigethar* was then left with strictly active meaning, and it engendered an analogical unsyncopated *·cruthaigethar* also with active meaning. McCone thus explains the syncope patterns of the deponents and passives as analogical extensions that came into being to reduce homonymy. This explanation appears cumbersome to me, but it is certainly possible if no more plausible account can be found.

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the truly regular reflex would be *\*·fogragathar*, but such a form never appears at all. The palatalization must be analogical.

The previous paragraph dealt strictly with conjunct forms, but McCone's explanation of the absolute verb ending *\*-tir*, combined with the exploitation of divergent syncope patterns just described, can generate the absolute verb forms like *fograigithir* < *\*uogaro-sagī-tir*.<sup>4</sup> He notes (145) that the passives would have taken over the ending *\*-tir* automatically at the same time that the deponents did: undifferentiated passive / deponent *\*uogaro-sagī-tor* ⇒ still undifferentiated passive / deponent *\*uogaro-sagī-tir* “sounds” with subsequent differentiation as outlined above. The replacement of *\*-tor* by *\*-tir* in the passive is, however, somewhat curious, and there are good reasons to believe that this analogy would not have been introduced. First, the trigger for the replacement was forms with enclitics, where the active non-deponent endings were used: initial *\*-tor* next to initial *\*-ti-E* induced an initial *\*-tir* (see above in Table 2 and immediately following discussion). The problem (acknowledged by McCone 145) is that passive verbs never suffixed enclitic pronouns at any stage of Pre-Irish<sup>5</sup>, meaning that the critical base for the analogy is missing in the case of passives. Further, even if the deponents were remade to *\*-tir*, the passive would likely not have followed, since the original *\*-tor* would have been very useful to differentiate the 3sg passive from the deponent (the older form in *\*-tor* being retained in a secondary meaning – the passive – following Kurylowicz' fourth law of analogy). The rhyming dentalless passive *\*-or* would have only served to strengthen *\*-tor* in the passive.

The above discussion has concentrated on McCone's explanation of the

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<sup>4</sup> That a short or long *\*i* could palatalize a following *\*r* is neither provable nor disprovable, but see McCone for a succinct, though ultimately conjectural, case for the progressive palatalization (144-5).

<sup>5</sup> The assumption of McCone (137) and Cowgill (106) is that outside the preterite the deponent and passive were undifferentiated for all persons until apocope. Thus, passives could never be found with an infix or suffixed pronoun in Insular Celtic or early Pre-Irish, i.e. at a time much later than the replacement of *\*-tor* by *\*-tir* on the analogy of verb forms with enclitics.

deponent endings in the present indicative. For the subjunctive and future, the arguments run roughly parallel to that sketched for the present indicative. Since both categories involve an additional syllable relative to the present (subj *\*·crutu-sagī(i)-ā-tor*<sup>6</sup> and fut *\*·crutu-sagī-fā-tor*) additional syncope difficulties bedevil these categories, but we need not discuss all the details here. They are mostly the same order of magnitude as those found in the present, involving analogical leveling so as to conform to syncope patterns found in a subset of the verbs (see Ó Cruaíoch 1997: 253, 260-1 for discussion of the two categories).

Finally, we may turn to the preterites. In the above discussion, only 3sg forms were used for exemplification, since the 3pl behaved similarly. In the preterite, however, we must consider both the singular and the plural forms. As set forth by McCone, the preforms would be the following:<sup>7</sup>

3sg	<i>*·uogaro-sagī-ss-etor</i> > <i>*·fogragaster</i> “he sounded”
3pl	<i>*·uogaro-sagī-ss-antor</i> > <i>*·fogragastar</i> “they sounded”
3sg	<i>*·crutu-sagī-ss-etor</i> > <i>*·cruthaigsethar</i> “he formed”
3pl	<i>*·crutu-sagī-ss-antor</i> > <i>·cruthaigsetar</i> “they formed”

Table 4: McCone’s *s*-preterite deponent

As noted by Cowgill (94), although in connection with the *s*-subjunctive and future of strong verbs, the inconvenient near-homophony of the singular and plural in some verbs would desperately have required remedy. Oddly, wholesale adoption of the

<sup>6</sup> Though see Ó Cruaíoch (forthcoming, chapter 7), who argues that the subjunctive of weak *i*-verbs was simply *\*-ī-*, replacing the inherited *\*-iīā-*. If that is correct, the subjunctive and indicative forms simply fell together (as in weak *ā*-verbs) and the argumentation for both would be the same.

<sup>7</sup> The morpheme *\*-ss-* is analogical, having been extended throughout the entire *s*-preterite paradigm from its original place in the 3sg. The phenomenon was suggested already by Thurneysen (1946: 417) and has been elaborated on by Watkins (1962: 177-178).

useful and clearly differentiated syncope pattern presented by \*·*cruthaigsethar* and ·*cruthaigsetar* did not occur. McCone assumes that, although the plural ·*cruthaigsetar* indeed was adopted, the singular eventually created was ·*cruthaigestar*. Ó Cruaíoch (1997: 260) notes that the adoption of this form is “a little strange,” given the perfectly regular model already available in \*·*sethar*, pl. *-setar*, but he assumes that the pair sg. *-estar*, pl. *-setar* would provide the greatest morphological contrast, which is the driving force behind the analogy in these paradigms on McCone’s model. The absolute forms in 3sg *-istir* and 3pl *-sitir* must then have been formed via the same analogy as in the present indicative.

There are a number of difficulties in this account of the preterite endings. The first is that syncopating the front vowel in \*·*ssetor* would have led to invariably palatalized \*·*-st-* in both absolute and conjunct. While the rarely attested absolute does show this palatalization (cf. *cíchnaigistir* “crashed” Sg 152<sup>b2</sup>), the conjunct always has a neutral cluster. Indeed, Cowgill (85) characterizes an analogical depalatalization of *-stir* / *-ster* as “highly unlikely,” though McCone (141) points to the model of the present *-ithir*, conjunct *-ethar*.

The problem of the palatalization, however, does not address the real issue, which is rather that the Insular Celtic *s*-preterite, like the Indo-European *s*-aorist from which it descended, was athematic. This is certainly true for the active forms and is extremely likely for the deponents as well. McCone does not explain his assumption of thematic forms for the deponent *s*-preterite.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the assumption of thematic

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<sup>8</sup> Also to be noted is the fact that a 3sg \*·*ssetor*, unlike all other 3sg deponent endings, would have to undergo syncope before the ending, unlike deponents elsewhere. It could be argued that the syncope was allowed here precisely because analogical differentiation between deponent and passive was not required in the preterite, since the preterite passive was formed to a different stem from the non-passive. That is true, but the same argument cannot account for the deponent suffixless preterites. Their passives are also formed to a different stem from the non-passives, yet the deponent suffixless preterites do not syncope (see below for discussion and an explanation).

endings causes a problem in the case of the 2sg *-ser*, which he derives from *\*-ssesor*. In other tenses, the 2sg deponent ending is *-ther* < *\*-tor*. McCone cannot motivate why *\*-ssesor* should have been preferred to *\*-ssetor* just here. A better solution is that an athematic *\*-s-tor* (with *\*-tor* seen elsewhere as the 2sg deponent ending) lies behind *\*-ser*. Cowgill sees this form as a relic of the athematic inflection of the *s*-aorist, also found in the 3sg ending. In order to argue for his theory on the form of the deponent endings, McCone is forced to deny the athematic ending of both the 2sg and 3sg deponent *s*-preterite, even though elsewhere the 3sg of *s*-formations is always athematic.<sup>9</sup> This fact renders his account of the *s*-preterite deponent endings unlikely.

McCone's theory that the 3rd person deponents can be explained by the exploitation of divergent syncope patterns and by analogy involving sentence-initial verbs followed by enclitics is highly flexible. However, the account relies on a large number of analogies, and while many of the analogies required are possible on their own, in their totality they become far less likely. In the preterite particularly, the assumptions become markedly improbable. Most problematic is that there is simply no viable way to save McCone's assumption of a thematic 3sg *\*-ss-e-tor*. Another solution must be found.

### Jasanoff's account of the deponent endings

Jasanoff (1997: 152-3; hereafter simply "Jasanoff") presents a compact and very different explanation of the deponent endings of the third person. He argues that if the deponent ending had the preform *\*(n)tro* and the passive ending had *\*(n)tor*, all

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<sup>9</sup> See, however, Schrijver 2007 (367-8) for a suggestion that the 3sg of the *s*-subjunctive and future is indeed thematic, but with secondary endings. I am not convinced by his arguments. See Stifter (2008: 282-5) for a critique of the Gaulish evidence underlying Schrijver's position.

major problems that the deponent endings present can be explained: lack of syncope in the third person active, palatalization of both consonants in the absolute forms of the third person, and the 3rd singular preterite with *-st-*.

To give his argument in broad strokes, Jasanoff contends that *\*-ntro* arose in the 3pl as an Italo-Celtic innovation through a crossing of the two Indo-European 3pl middle endings *\*-ntor* and *\*-ro(r)*. The Pre-Celtic result was the following (from Jasanoff, 159):

	3sg	3pl
passive	<i>*-tor</i>	<i>*-ntro</i>
	<i>*-or</i> <sup>10</sup>	
deponent	<i>*-tor</i>	<i>*-ntro</i>

Table 5: The Pre-Celtic passive and deponent endings

Jasanoff then argues that the deponent singular adopted *\*-tro* as its ending while the passive plural became *\*-ntor* (the support of *\*-or* being crucial here).<sup>11</sup> This solution obviously entails that the passive / deponent distinction in Old Irish continues something quite old.

Now we may turn to how exactly deponent endings *\*(n)tro* help with the problem at hand. First, it is well known that after apocope and anaptyxis *\*-tro* gave *-thar*, but examples like *arathar* “plow” < *\*aratrom* show that such forms were not

<sup>10</sup> The ending *\*-or* was originally an archaic medio-passive ending, but already in late Indo-European it began to be specialized as a passive (Jasanoff, 158-9). This process was complete in Pre-Celtic.

<sup>11</sup> Cowgill (93-4) notes that the 3pl passive, but not the 3sg, is very frequently not syncopated, even when syncope would have been expected. He attributes this to the need to differentiate singular and plural, which would otherwise have fallen together in passive of the *s*-subjunctive and *s*-future. Non-syncope in other tenses and moods would then be analogical. Cowgill is surely correct about the *s*-formations. An additional contributing factor can be entertained, however: perhaps the Pre-Celtic 3pl passive *\*-ntro* was never fully ousted by *\*-ntor*. If that were the case, it could be expected that some non-syncopated 3pl passives would be found (e.g. *·rimiter*, *·gaibetar* in the Cambrai Homily, *Thes Pal* ii 246.8 and 247.15). This is only a possibility, but it is a reasonable one.

subject to syncope. In this way, deponent *\*āgetro* “fears” yielded *·ágathar*, but passive *\*āgetor* “is feared” became *·áigther*. Second, in absolute forms of the deponents, Jasanoff assumes that *\*-tro* was followed by the Cowgill particle *\*-es*, yielding *\*-tres* (this result is analogical after the other persons in the deponent; see Jasanoff, 152-3). Loss of final syllables caused *-es* to drop, with subsequent palatalization of *both* consonants (as seen for instance in acc sg *bréthir* “word” < *\*brētren*), yielding the ending *-thir* seen in *suidigithir*. Finally, the assumption of a deponent *\*-tro* can explain the 3rd singular deponent *s*-preterite ending *-star*. Since the 3rd person singular form of the *s*-preterite in Irish was athematic (see above), the 3sg deponent *s*-preterite ending was *\*-s-tro*, which gives *-star* without problem.<sup>12</sup> The assumption of a Cowgill particle combined with the proposal that the deponents had the ending *\*(n)tro* and the passives *\*(n)tor* yields an explanation capable of explaining the difficulties presented by the deponent endings.

As it stands, Jasanoff’s argument relies on the Cowgill particle to generate the absolute endings. Even if one accepts McCone’s arguments against the Cowgill particle, however, Jasanoff’s explanation is still possible. It is simply necessary to transfer some of McCone’s arguments onto the preforms assumed by Jasanoff. On these assumptions, the Insular Celtic 3sg deponent was *\*meditro*, which gives the conjunct *·midethar* directly. McCone’s theory dictates that this form was regular in non-initial position and initial position without an enclitic. With an enclitic, McCone has claimed the form was *\*mediti-E*, i.e. a non-deponent form. I would like to suggest

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<sup>12</sup> Schrijver (1995: 454-5) disputes that intervocalic *\*-str-* yielded *-star*, claiming rather that it gave *-thar*. His examples, however, are not convincing. First, *náthar* “of us two” is not the same as *L noster*. Rather, it is a dual and continues a PIE suffix *\*-tero-* attached to *\*noh<sub>3</sub>* (see Katz 1998: 271). Similarly, *sethar* “yours (pl)” is probably modeled after the dual type in *\*-tero-* seen in *náthar*. Finally, *cathir* “city” should not be compared to Welsh *caer* < *L castra*, since the Irish word is a velar stem (gen sg *cathrach*). Positive evidence for the retention of *-str-* is found in OIr *ailestar*, W and NB *elestr* “sword-flag, iris” < *\*alistro-* as well as W *rhwystr* “disability” next to Irish *\*ríastraid* “goes mad” < *\*reig-stro-*, although in the latter example, *\*-str-* is not strictly intervocalic.

that the form was rather *\*meditri-E* and that the *\*meditri* was eventually generalized in absolute initial position even without enclitics, where it regularly became *midithir*.

This sequence of events assumes a few things. First, it assumes that the *\*i* was at some stage interpreted as an element used before clitics and extended to verbs that did not have *\*i*. This is logical in McCone's system, and he makes exactly this argument (107-8), although with reference to the *s*-preterites, not deponent verbs. Within the deponent paradigm, the 2sg *\*meditor-i-E* could provide a convenient analogical base from which the *\*i* could spread, since it would be quite useful at breaking up heavy consonant clusters: *\*meditor-i-snīs* "you (sg) judge us". This argument is basically McCone's, simply transferred to the deponents. From its restriction to initial position before clitics, *\*meditri* was then generalized to initial position, in the same way *\*bereti* was under McCone's system (108), and *midithir* and *beirid* are the result.

The other assumption entailed in the above scenario is that the substitution of active for deponent morphology with suffixed pronouns (*foilsigthi* "reveals it" beside *foilsigithir*) did not take place as early as envisioned by McCone (142-3). While it could have occurred early, it need not have. McCone is certainly correct that "the quite serious constraints upon the use of suffixed pronouns in Old Irish are rather obviously for the most part a quite recent response to phonetic complications that can hardly have arisen before the sixth century A.D." (143). Given this, it seems plausible to suggest that the requirement that suffixed pronouns be attached to verbs with non-deponent morphology was introduced also at this time, i.e. in very late Pre-Old Irish.

The previous three paragraphs have attempted to show that Jasanoff's essential insight, that the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of deponent verbs was *\*(n)tro*, is capable of

generating the attested deponent verb endings in Old Irish regardless of whether one accepts some variant of the Cowgill particle hypothesis or whether one prefers McCone’s non-particle theory. The overall discussion to this point has been a necessary preliminary, since the form of the deponent endings is critical to the main point of the present article: the endings of the deponent suffixless preterite.

### The deponent suffixless preterite

The deponent suffixless preterite has the following forms (absolute and conjunct endings are the same):

<i>do·ménar</i>	“I thought”	<i>do·ménammar</i>	“we thought”
<i>do·ménar</i>	“you (sg) thought”	<i>do·ménaid</i>	“you (pl) thought”
<i>do·ménair</i>	“he thought”	<i>do·ménatar</i>	“they thought”

Table 6: Old Irish preterite deponent paradigm

The peculiarity of these forms lies in the fact that the endings do not allow syncope, as is shown by *im·rumadir* Wb 13<sup>b</sup>31 “he has sinned,” next to 3sg perfect *ru·mīdair* Ml 72<sup>b</sup>21 “he has thought.” Cowgill (82-3) acknowledges that the lack of syncope would be possible if the endings of the singular were *\*-ra*, *\*-ra*, *\*-re* (i.e. the *r* of the middle followed by the Old Irish continuants of the perfect endings), but he sees no possible model by which such endings could be created. McCone (1994: 171) attempts to provide such a model, suggesting that the perfect endings *\*-a*, *\*-as*, *\*-e* were medialized by applying *-r-* before the endings in order to avoid the phonotactically unacceptable cluster in 2sg *\*-asr* that would have resulted had the medialization been suffixed. The argument for prefixing the medializing *\*r* is not compelling. Another

explanation must be found. A related problem is seen in the preterito-present *ro·fitir* “he knows, knew,” MW *gwyr*, both from *\*uid-re*, which contains the same *\*-re* proposed for the deponent preterites.

A solution to this unexpected appearance of the medial *-r-* before the endings is available if we consider Jasanoff’s contention that the 3rd person deponent endings continue *\*(n)tro*. Jasanoff (2003: 44-5) argues that the Old Irish deponent preterites are descendants of a late Indo-European perfect middle. Thus, *·ménair*<sup>13</sup> is more or less directly equatable with Avestan *mamne* < *\*memnoi* ⇐ *\*me-mn-or* (with the standard Indo-Iranian replacement of the middle marker *\*r* with *\*i*). As it stands, however, this reconstruction cannot account for the lack of syncope in forms like *im·rumadir*, since a preform *\*ro-mīd-or* would lead to *\*·ruimdir*. A preform *\*ro-mīd-ro*,<sup>14</sup> however, would yield the correct Old Irish form. Since Jasanoff is most probably correct that the deponent endings in Old Irish developed from *\*(n)tro*, it would have been quite remarkable if a deponent *\*-or* were not remade to *\*-ro* so as to conform to the pattern for all other deponents. With such a remade ending, *im·rumadir* would be regular from *\*imbe·ro-mīd-ro*. Other persons could have followed the pattern of the 3rd person at any time. That is, they could have been remodeled to *\*-rV* before the time of apocope or could fail to syncope in Classical Old Irish on the model of the third person. The first option strikes me as more probable, but both possibilities would yield a consistently unscopated deponent preterite.

Of course, not all scholars accept that the perfect middle was a late Indo-European category. Many argue rather that it first arose separately in the histories of

<sup>13</sup> The loss of the second *\*m* with compensatory lengthening is analogical (see note 15). The palatalization in the 3sg Jasanoff takes to be modelled after the active preterites, where the old perfect ending regularly caused palatalization: *·geguin* “he slew” < *\*g<sup>uh</sup>e-g<sup>uh</sup>on-e*.

<sup>14</sup> As noted by Thurneysen (1946: 74), *\*d* did not lenite before *\*r*, but analogy would surely have restored *mīdair* (for expected *\*mītair*) on the model of the present *midithir*. On this, see further below.

Greek, Indo-Iranian, and Celtic. Even if this contention is true, however, it does not materially affect the argument presented here. Assuming for the moment that the perfect middle is a Celtic creation, the Pre-Irish form leading to *·mídair* would rather have been a regular perfect *\*mīde*<sup>15</sup> that was at some point medialized as *\*mīder*, so that all tenses of the verb were deponent. As soon as the reshaping of the preterite *\*mīde* to *\*mīder* took place, however, the same explanation advanced above for the lack of syncope in deponent preterites will hold: because all other deponent 3rd persons had *\*-rV*, not *\*-Vr*, *\*mīder* could have been remade to *\*mīdre*, which would give *·mídair* (albeit with analogical depalatalization of the medial *d*)<sup>16</sup>.

We have now seen that, regardless of whether or not one believes the perfect middle was an Indo-European verbal category, it is possible to explain the non-syncope of the deponent suffixless preterites in Old Irish. The solution preferred here is that the perfect middle was inherited into Celtic, i.e. that Jasanoff is correct in his basic explanation of the origin of the deponent suffixless preterites in Old Irish. Still,

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<sup>15</sup> The vocalism of the preterite middle has been extensively remodelled. Originally it most likely had zero grade, which by regular sound law in Irish would have often led to a long vowel, as in *·génair* “she bore” < *\*ge-gn-*. The long vowel was then interpreted as a marker of the class and was introduced into verbs where it was not phonologically expected, as in *·ménair*. Schumacher (74-7) argues that the long vowel would have been regular in some cases already in Indo-European and was generalized in Insular Celtic. For *\*mīde* specifically, comparison with Gk *médōmai* “I consider, determine” indicates that the long vowel may be old (with Celtic *\*ī* < IE *\*ē*). In the end, it does not matter which explanation for the category “perfect middle” is correct, since the reconstruction of the class as a whole holds together no matter which explanation one adopts to explain the long vowel.

<sup>16</sup> The precise analogy by which the depalatalization took place is not totally clear, but the following is likely. There are only eight non-preteropresents which form deponent suffixless preterites: *·gainithir*, *·laimethar*, *·midithir*, *·moinethar*, *·daimid*, *·ic*, *·saidid*, and *·comairc*. Under the scenario just illustrated, the Pre-Old Irish form of the deponent suffixless preterite was *\*CVC-re*, which should have given *\*CVC'r* and then *\*CVC'ŕ* via vocalization of the *\*r* (Thurneysen 1946: 70). Exactly what happened next is open to some interpretation. It has been suggested (Griffith 2007: 45 and esp. note 24) that non-dental consonants were depalatalized before a vocalic resonant. Four of the eight verbs listed above have non-dental consonants root finally, meaning that *CVC-air* (e.g. *·lámair*) would be the expected outcome. In two further examples (*·gainithir* and *·moinethar*) the palatalization of the root-final consonant is found only in the present. The neutral quality in *·génair* and *·ménair* may thus have been levelled from the non-presential forms. The final two verbs (*·midithir* and *·saidid*) have palatalized root-final consonants throughout, but they may have adopted the neutral root-final consonantism of the other members of this small class of deponent suffixless preterites. This explanation is admittedly speculative, but it is plausible.

however, rejecting this theory does not require the rejection of the basic explanation offered here for the lack of syncope in deponent suffixless preterites.

### Old Irish *ro·fitir* “he knows, he knew”

The scenario argued for above, i.e. a medialized perfect with remodeled endings, can also explain the paradigm *ro·fetar, ro·fetar, ro·fitir* “I, you (sg), he knows / knew.”

British Celtic evidence (Schrijver 1995: 353-5) requires a 3sg of the form *\* $\underline{u}id-rV$* , and the Irish form further specifies that the unknown vowel be front and non-low. Only *\*-re* is possible morphologically. We may assume that the original form was *\* $\underline{u}ide$* , a continuation of the late Indo-European perfect *\* $\underline{u}óide$* . Subsequently, the paradigm was medialized by the addition of *\*-r*. Normally, the 3sg medial ending was *\*-tro*, but specifically in the deponent suffixless preterite, *\*-r* was the available choice, as seen in the remaining deponent suffixless preterites. Once *\* $\underline{u}ider$*  was created, it would have followed all other deponents and undergone *\*-Vr > \*-rV* to *\* $\underline{u}idre$* , which gives OIr *·fitir*, MW *gwyr*.<sup>17</sup>

One difficulty with this explanation, however, is the non-lenited [d] in the Irish forms. Normally, a post-vocalic Pre-Irish *\*d* yielded a voiced fricative in Old Irish (cf. *luid* [luδ'] “he went” < *\*lude*). McCone (1994: 171) seeks to trace the unlenited [d] to the third plural *ro·fetar*, which he claims would be regular from *\* $\underline{u}idontar$* . That is, he argues that syncope of the middle syllable of *\* $\underline{u}idontar$*  gave 3pl *·fetar*, whence the [d] was generalized to the other persons of the verb. He assumes that the variant form *ro·fetatar* simply shows an analogical reapplication of the ending *-atar*. If this were so,

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<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note that this single example preserves the palatalized cluster expected from syncope in *\*CVC-re* (see previous note). The isolated nature of this verb may be responsible for its resisting the depalatalization seen in some other deponent suffixless preterites.

the parallel case of 3pl *lotar* “they went” < *\*ludontar* becomes problematic. Here, the syncope of the middle syllable gave *lotar* [lodar], but no reformed *lotatar* is found, and, more importantly, the [d] did not spread throughout the paradigm. There is no 3sg *\*luit* “he went.” Rather, we find *luid*, with [δ] < *\*d*. Since *luid* is paradigmatically isolated in Old Irish, it is unlikely that [d] would not have spread here, but would have spread in the otherwise parallel case of *·fitir*.

We should also note that the deponent preterite third person plural does not normally syncopate, which Cowgill (83) and Thurneysen (1946: 434) assume is phonologically regular. Therefore, 3pl *·fetar* could not have arisen via syncope in the first place. The likely explanation for the lack of syncope in the deponent 3pl preterite is that the ending was actually *\*-ntro*, just like all the other 3pl deponent endings. Thus, a form like *génatar* “they were born” is not *\*géntar* because the preform was *\*gegnantro*, which would have prohibited syncope from occurring. It is true that syncope is occasionally found in the 3pl deponent preterite (and only there among the 3rd person deponent endings), but it only occurs as a result of confusion with the regularly syncopating non-deponent ending (cf. *lotar* < *\*ludontar*), with which it is otherwise identical in Classical Old Irish. The upshot of this discussion is that the 3rd plural *·fetar* is not phonologically expected as a 3pl deponent, and thus the 3rd plural is unlikely to have triggered the wholesale replacement of [δ] by [d] in the rest of the verb’s paradigm.

We must therefore find another explanation for the non-lenition of the *\*d* in *ro·fitir*. The correct analysis of the [d] was seen already by Thurneysen (1946: 74), who claimed that in the sequence *\*-dr-*, *\*d* was not lenited (or was delenited). Evidence is slight, but appears to support the claim (cf. OIr *cretar* “relic” MW *creir* <

*\*kredrV*).<sup>18</sup> Thus, *\*uidre* in the 3sg regularly gave OIr *·fitir* [f'ɪd'ər'], and [d] subsequently spread from the 3sg to the rest of the paradigm.

We have now offered a solution to the as-of-yet unexplained lack of syncope in the deponent suffixless preterite. Following the pattern of deponent endings in other tenses (3sg *\*-tro*, 3pl *\*-ntro*), the deponent endings of the suffixless preterite were remade from inherited *\*-or*, pl *\*-ntor* to *\*-ro*, pl *\*-ntro*. This solution brings these deponent endings in line formally with the deponent endings of other tenses and moods in Irish. In doing so, it explains the lack of syncope found in the deponent suffixless preterite, and it can generate the unlenited [d] of *ro·fitir*.

## Summary of Conclusions

The goal of this paper was to examine and explain the lack of syncope in the deponent suffixless preterites of Old Irish. To do so, it was necessary to consider the preforms of the deponent verbs in some depth. Of the two most thorough explanations, Jasanoff's (1997) was found to be the most efficient at explaining the deponent endings. Although he adopts Cowgill's (1975) solution to the difference between absolute and conjunct verbs, it was shown here that Jasanoff's explanation holds regardless of whether one adopts Cowgill's proposal or not.

After this lengthy but necessary review of the deponent endings' prehistory, we turned our attention to the deponent suffixless preterite, the non-syncope of which

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<sup>18</sup> The obvious counterexamples to the sound law involve the preverb *\*ad* before the perfectivizing particle *\*ro*, a sequence which gave *ár* via *\*adro*. Such examples, however, are due to analogical reshaping based on shifting verbal accent patterns, as seen in *ad·ro[da]mar-su* [að róðəməɾ] "thou hast conceded" Acr 7<sup>a</sup>1 with accent on the second syllable, next to *dús in·árdamar-su* "if thou hast conceded" Acr 10<sup>c</sup>2 with initial accent in the sequence [áðróðəməɾ]. The lenition of *\*d* underlying *·árdamar* was introduced from the deuterotonic form.

had not yet been explained. By assuming that the 3sg suffixless preterite deponent ending *\*-or* became *\*-ro* on the model of the 3sg *\*-tro* found elsewhere in the deponents, unsyncoated forms like *im ·rumadir* become explicable: *\*·ro-mīdor* *\*·ro-mīd-ro* > *\*·ru-mid-r* > *·rumadir*. A related explanation is responsible for the inflection of Celtic *\*ūide* “he knows / knew,” which adopted deponent inflection (*\*ūide* > *\*ūider*) and subsequently changed the *\*-Vr* ending in the 3rd person to *\*-rV* to conform to the pattern in other deponents (*\*ūider* > *\*ūidre* > OIr. *·fitir*).

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