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Old Irish

Morphosyntactic Structures – Part 2



A Roadmap

Word classes

Structure of noun clauses

Prepositional Phrases

Text examples: *Táin bó Froích*

Word classes: an overview

Word classes are sharply distinguished by morphology and syntax.

Open classes:

- **Verbs** are heavily synthetic (very large number of forms).
- **Nouns and Adjectives** are inflected, with a moderate number of forms. Also synthetic.
- **Numbers** are either adjectives (1–10) or nouns (higher numbers).
- **Adverbs** may be derived from substantivized neuter adjectives (*in maith* ‘well’, *co glé* ‘clearly’); other times without specific marking.

Word classes: an overview

Word classes are sharply distinguished by morphology and syntax.

Closed classes:

- **Demonstrative pronouns** have a two-way deixis system.
- **Personal pronouns** also have clitic forms.
- **Prepositions** may be simple (closed class) or complex (small but open).

Nominal Structure



Linearization of nominal structures

- Preferred order: Determiner – Quantifier – Noun – Adjective

cid na olc m-bec (Ml. 35c9)
even any.ACC.SG.NT evil.ACC.SG.NT NAS-little.ACC.SG.NT
'even any little evil'

arnaib=huilib geintib ecnib (Wb. 1b6)
for.ART.DAT.PL.M=all.DAT.PL.M gentile.DAT.PL wise.DAT.PL.M
'for all the wise Gentiles'

Linearization of nominal structures (continued)

- Numerals (cardinal and ordinal) are special:
 - ‘one’ and ‘first’ are prefixed to nouns to form a compound
 - ‘two’ , ‘three / third’ through ‘ten / tenth’ are adjectives linearized like quantifiers (i.e. pre-nominal)
 - ‘two’, ‘three’ and ‘four’ are declined; ‘five’ through ‘ten’ are indeclinable
 - ‘second’ is a regular adjective (but can also be compounded like ‘one’ and ‘first’)
 - all larger numbers are nouns

<i>cech</i>	<i>n-oin-dliged</i>	(Ml. 14d5)	<i>Cōic bliadni</i>	<i>deac</i>	(Ml. 16c10)
every.ACC.SG	NAS-one-saying.ACC.SG		five year.NOM.PL	-teen	
‘every single saying’			‘fifteen years’		

Linearization of nominal structures (continued)

- More than two elements (quantifiers, adjectives, etc.) exceedingly rare
- Genitive NPs follow the head noun (though in poetry there are exceptions)
 - Clitics and PPs may intervene between noun and gen., but not between noun and adj.

ba=imchomarc

COP.3SG.SBJV=question.NOM.SG

‘it would be an idle question’

n-espach=som

NAS-idle.NOM.SG.NT=3SG.MASC

(Ml. 35c26)

rombo=discipul=som

COP.3SG.PERF=disciple.NOM.SG=3SG.MASC apostle.GEN.PL

‘that he was a disciple of apostles’

apstal

(Wb. 18d1)

Agreement of nominals

- Adjectives (both attributive AND predicative) agree with their head noun in gender, number, and case.

Exception 1: equative, comparative, and superlative are only predicative and never agree.

Exception 2: *uile* 'all' MAY stand in the default case (NOM.) when agreeing with a pronoun.

ro-ptis=imdai

PRV-be.3PL.COND=abundant.NOM.PL.FEM

'punishments would be abundant'

piana

punishment.NOM.PL

(MI. 15c8)

doib huili (Wb 25c31)

to.DAT.PL all.NOM.PL

'to them all'

indib huilib (Sg. 161b3)

in.3PL.DAT all.DAT.PL

'in them all'

Gender

- GENDER DISTINCTION in nouns and adjectives: masculine – feminine – neuter.
- GENDER DISTINCTION in pronouns: masculine – feminine – neuter for some; no distinction for others.
- Gender detectable by adjective agreement.
- GENDER ASSIGNMENT: semantic or morphological.
- GENDER RESOLUTION: no evidence (yet).

Number

- SINGULAR: as one would expect
- DUAL: only exists for nouns (not adjectives, pronouns or verbs); used for pairs (either natural or occasional pairs); always accompanied by the number ‘two’.

etir *da* *n-ainmm* *cosmaili* (Sg. 28a7)
between two.ACC.DU.NT NAS-noun.ACC.DU similar.ACC.PL.NT
‘between two similar nouns’

- PLURAL: as one would expect

CASE SYSTEM: OVERVIEW OF CASE FUNCTIONS

Case	Core functions	Non-core functions
Nominative	SUBJECT/AGENT	DEFAULT CASE OBJECTIVE / SECONDARY PREDICATE (IN LATER TEXTS)
Vocative	DIRECT ADDRESS	
Genitive	POSSESSIVE GENITIVE SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE OBJECTIVE GENITIVE PREDICATIVE GENITIVE OBJECT OF COMPLEX PREPOSITIONS	COMPLEMENT OF ADJECTIVES (RARE) TIME

CASE SYSTEM: OVERVIEW OF CASE FUNCTIONS

Case	Core functions	Non-core functions
Dative / Prepositional	PREPOSITIONAL OBJECT	TIME (POINT) INSTRUMENT MEANS COMPLEMENT OF COMPARATIVE ADVERBIAL FORMATION
Accusative	DIRECT OBJECT PREPOSITIONAL OBJECT	TIME (DURATION) DIRECTION OF MOTION OBJECTIVE / SECONDARY PREDICATE (IN EARLY TEXTS) COMPLEMENT OF EQUATIVES (AND A FEW ADJECTIVES)

Referentiality

- Old Irish has a definite article (see above and the morphology presentation).

- Old Irish appears to have two-way deixis: proximal vs. medial-distal.
 - *so / se / sa* ‘this (cataphoric)’ and *sin* ‘this (anaphoric)’ vs *tall* ‘that, yonder’
 - cf. Modern Irish *seo* ‘this’ vs. *sin* ‘that’ vs. *siúd / úd* ‘yonder’ < OIr. *ucut* ‘by you’

- Indefiniteness is unmarked.

Adpositional structure



Adpositional Structure

- Old Irish has prepositions only (right branching).
- Prepositions are non-omissible.
 - There are rare exceptions for means and instrumentals (more so in poetry).

l̄eir *ingnu* (Thes. II. 293,16)
earnest.DAT.SG.NT comprehension.DAT.SG
‘with diligent comprehension’ (note also irregular word order)

co=n-ingnu *l̄eir*
with=NAS-comprehension.DAT.SG earnest.DAT.SG.NT
‘with diligent comprehension’

Adpositional Structure

Two varieties exist: simple and complex / nominal.

- Simple prepositions: frequently synonymous with preverbs and / or conjunctions.
- Complex prepositions: come from nouns or older prepositional phrases.

Prep. *ar* 'for, because of' = Conj. *ar* 'for, since' = Preverb *ar*

Prep. *co^N* 'with' = conj. *co^N* 'and, so that, in order that' = preverb *con*

Prep. *i n-degaid* 'after' < *i n-dígaid* 'in search of' (vn. **dígaid* 'searching')

Prep. *dochum^N* 'toward' < vn. *tochim* 'a stepping toward'

Adpositional Structure

Two varieties exist: simple and complex / nominal.

- Simple prepositions: take the accusative and / or dative cases
- Complex prepositions: take the genitive case

i^N + acc. 'into' vs. *i^N* + dat. 'in, at'

for + acc. 'onto' vs. *for* + dat. 'on'

la + acc. 'with'

do^L + dat. 'to, for'

i n-degaid + gen. 'after' < *i n-degaid X* 'in search of X'

Ad·tlochur indithim dúib!

TEXT SAMPLE (TÁIN BÓ FROÍCH LL. 41–43, 61–62, 64–65, 68–70)

Background: After getting fairy gifts, Fróech and his marvellous retinue travel to visit Findabair.

<i>fo·cerdat</i>	<i>inna=míl-choin</i>	<i>bedg</i>	<i>i=m-Brei.</i>
PRV·throw.3PL	ART.NOM.PL.F=beast.dog.NOM.PL	leap.ACC.SG	in=NAS-PN.ACC.PL

<i>Gabait</i>	<i>secht</i>	<i>n-dobor-chona.</i>	<i>Do-s·m-bertatar</i>	<i>dochum</i>
take.3PL	seven	NAS-water-dog.ACC.PL	PRV-3PL.OBJ·NAS-bring.3PL.PRET	toward

<i>na=arddae</i>	<i>i=n-dorus</i>	<i>inna=prím-rátha.</i>
ART.GEN.SG.F=height.GEN.SG	in=NAS-door.ACC.SG	ART.GEN.SG.F=primary-fort.GEN.SG

‘The hounds take a leap into the Brei. They capture seven otters. The brought them toward the height in front of the fortress.’

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<i>“Fochen dúib”</i>	<i>ol</i>	<i>Ailill</i>	<i>ocus</i>	<i>Medb.</i>	<i>“Is=ed</i>
welcome to.2PL	says	PN.NOM.SG	and	PN.NOM.SG	is.3SG=3SG.NT
<i>do·ro·achtamar”</i>	<i>ol</i>	<i>Fróech...</i>	<i>im·beir</i>	<i>Medb</i>	<i>ocus</i>
PRV·PFCT-come.for.1PL.PRET	says	PN.NOM.SG	play.3SG	PN.NOM.SG	and
<i>Ailill</i>	<i>fidchill</i>	<i>íar=sin.</i>	<i>Gaibid</i>	<i>Fróech</i>	<i>íarum</i>
PN.NOM.SG	chess.ACC.SG	after.that	take.3sg		after.3sg.nt
<i>imbirt</i>	<i>fidchille</i>	<i>Ba=caíniu=side</i>	<i>fidchellaib.</i>		
play.ACC.SG	chess.GEN.SG	is.3SG.PRET=beautiful.CMPTV=3SG	chess.set.DAT.PL		

“Welcome to you” say Ailill and Medb. “That is what we have come for” says Fróech. After that, Medb and Ailill play chess. Fróech begins then to play chess. It was more beautiful than (other) chess sets.’

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welcome to.2PL	says	PN.NOM.SG	and	PN.NOM.SG	is.3SG=3SG.NT
<i>do-ro-achtamar"</i>	<i>ol</i>	<i>Fróech...</i>	<i>im-beir</i>	<i>Medb</i>	<i>ocus</i>
PRV·PFCT-come.for.1PL.PRET	says	PN.NOM.SG	play.3SG	PN.NOM.SG	and
<i>Ailill</i>	<i>fidchill</i>	<i>íar=sin.</i>	<i>Gaibid</i>	<i>Fróech</i>	<i>íarum</i>
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<i>“Aurgnaid</i>	<i>biad</i>	<i>do-naib=ócaib”</i>	<i>ol</i>	<i>Ailill.</i>
Prepare.IMPV.2PL	food.ACC.SG	for-ART.DAT.PL.M=warrior.DAT.PL	says	PN.NOM.SG

<i>“Ní=ed</i>	<i>as=accobor</i>	<i>limm”</i>	<i>ol</i>	<i>Medb</i>
NEG-is.3SG=3SG.NT	is.3.SG.REL=desire.NOM.SG	with.1SG	says	PN.NOM.SG

<i>“acht</i>	<i>dul</i>	<i>do=imbirt</i>	<i>na=fidchille=tall</i>
but	going.NOM.SG	to=play.DAT.SG	ART.GEN.SG.F=chess.GEN.SG=yonder

fri Fróech.”
 against=PN.ACC.SG

“Prepare food for the warriors!” says Ailill. “It is not that that I want”, says Medb “but to go to play that chess yonder with Fróech.”

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 Prepare.IMPV.2PL food.ACC.SG for-ART.DAT.PL.M=warrior.DAT.PL says PN.NOM.SG

“Ní=ed as=accobor limm” ol Medb
 NEG-is.3SG=3SG.NT is.3.SG.REL=desire.NOM.SG with.1SG says PN.NOM.SG

“acht dul do=imbirt na=fidchille=tall
 but going.NOM.SG to=play.DAT.SG ART.GEN.SG.F=chess.GEN.SG=yonder

fri Fróech.”
 against=PN.ACC.SG

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