

## Old Irish standard-of-comparison constructions

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This paper discusses the development of Irish standard-of-comparison constructions from the earliest attested examples (8th century) to the end of the Middle Irish period (12th century). The background for this paper is found in an argument-adjunct distinction found in operator-constructions, due to the fact that Old Irish standard-of-comparison constructions behave like adjunct-operator constructions. The distinction between arguments and adjuncts in these constructions is manifested by phonological ‘mutations’ that are characteristic of Celtic languages. In Irish, the mutations are called *lenition*, which changes a stop to a fricative and *nasalization*, which voices an unvoiced sound and changes voiced stops to nasals.

Operator-variable chains representing arguments exhibit lenition in two cases: if the argument is a subject or if the argument is an object of neuter gender, with non-neuter objects, nasalization is found. Chains representing adjuncts only exhibit nasalization. Such mutations can be viewed as PF-reflexes of Spec-Head agreement between the operator and the head X introducing the subordinate clause. The verb linearly adjacent to X undergoes the specified mutation. The following examples show these distinctions:

- 1) Subject: ind hul-i doín-i ro-chreit-s-et  
the.PL all-PL men-PL PRF-(LENITION)believe-PST-3P  
‘All the men who believed...’ (MI. 60b16) (lenition c > ch)
- 2) Object (neuter): an ad-chi-am  
the.one PV-(LENITION)see-1P  
‘The one that we see...’ (MI. 112b13) (lenition c > ch)
- 3) Object (feminine): chech irnigde do-ngne-id  
Each prayer PV-(NASALIZATION)do.SBJ-2P  
‘each prayer that you may make...’ (Wb. 5c20) (nasalization g > ng)
- 4) Adjunct: in tindnacuil sin du-n-écomnach-t Día inní  
the deliverance that PV-NAS-PRF.deliver-PST.3S God that.one  
‘That deliverance by which God delivered that one.’ (MI. 55c1)

In this paper, I argue that standard-of-comparison constructions were adjunct-operator constructions, because they exhibit nasalization of the verb. They are characterized by the elements *ol daas* where *ol* is a former preposition “beyond” and *daas* a nasalized relative verb “which is” (non-nasalized: *taas*). The translation indicates the adjunct-operator status of this construction with the words ‘the way that’.

- 5) is doch-u indala n-ái ol da-as anail.  
COP likely-COMP one 3P.GEN beyond (NAS)be-REL.3S other  
“One of them is more likely than the way that the other is.” (Wb. 4b24)

Where the predicate of a standard-of-comparison construction differed from the main predicate, the adjunct-operator construction was followed by a complement clause – also marked with nasalization in OI (although it is not the PF-reflex of Spec-Head agreement, as complement

clauses lack an operator in SpecX). This two clause analysis is indicated in the example by the words [the way it is [that ...]].

- 6) ol da-as a-ta1 ndiglaid-i...  
 beyond (NAS)be-REL COP.PRS-3P.REL (NAS)vengeful-PL  
 ‘...than the way it is that they are vengeful...’ (Ml. 111c8)

During the Old Irish period, several related changes affected the constructions shown in examples (5) and (6). These changes were driven by the ambiguity of the nasalized complement clause following *ol daas*, which could either be a complement clause or an adjunct-operator construction introduced by a complementiser *oldaas*. Because of this ambiguity, [[C ol] ... [V-T *daas*] ...] was reanalyzed as a complementiser [C *oldaas*]. This reanalysis was also helped by the fact that *daas* was no longer found in other operator constructions (such as relative clauses), where forms such as *ro-ngab* (+nasalizing operator) and *fil[e]* (+leniting operator) had become common. The second reanalysis was that the complement clause became an adjunct-operator construction. Essentially, these changes result in clause collapsing, from the original construction (7) to the new (8):

- 7) [CP [C ol] [XP OP [X' [X] [TP [V-T *daas*] [...]]]]]  
 8) [CP [C *oldaas*] [XP OP [X [TP verb/predicate...]]]

These two reanalyses were followed by a number of extensions, in which the underlying syntactic analysis of these constructions became clear through a series of phonological and morphological realignments. With the reanalysis of *ol daas* to a complementiser, the verbal characteristics of *daas* were lost: it eventually no longer manifested person/number/tense distinctions and it underwent subsequent phonetic change to Modern Irish *ná*. Furthermore, its use in sentences in which the main clause predicate and the standard-of-comparison predicate were the same (example 5) could now be viewed as a complementiser with an elided predicate, stranding the subject in its (normal for Irish) post predicate position. Finally, the reanalysis of a complement clause as an adjunct-operator construction in sentences having different predicates (example 6) was later manifested by the introduction of the overt-operator *mar* ‘how/like/as’, which appears to be common in the 12th century (although likely introduced earlier). An example of this new construction is found in the Modern Irish:

- 9) Labhraí-onn sé níos fearr ná mar a scríobh-ann sé.  
 speak-3S.PRS he COMP better than like that write-3S.PRS he

This paper will contribute to the general knowledge about argument-adjunct distinctions by providing data from a previously under-studied language (OI). Additionally, it will show that the history of Irish standard-of-comparison constructions can be explained with reference to a theory of reanalysis, extension and syntax-driven grammaticalisation.

#### References:

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