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Qualitative enhancement of sonorant quantity in Celtic and beyond

Pavel Iosad

Empirical focus

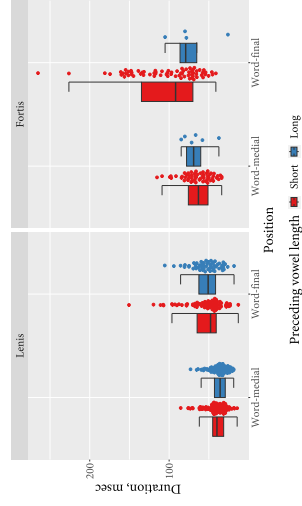
- A curious but repeating pattern in (Western) Europe
- A contrast in quantity between sonorants exists word-medially, but not word-initially
- Quantity contrast > quality distinctions
- Word-initial sonorants have long reflexes

Connacht Irish (Ní Chiosáin 1991)

Old Irish	Coda	Onset
<i>gel</i>	gʲeɫ	gʲeɫə
'bright'	<i>geal</i>	<i>gealadh</i> VN
<i>geallaid</i>	gʲaɫ	gʲeɫə
'promise'	<i>geall</i>	<i>gealladh</i> VN

- /gʲaɫ/ 'bright' ≠ /gʲaɫʲə/ 'promise'
- Compensatory lengthening: /gʲaɫʲə/ → [gʲaɫʲəː]
- No moraic onsets: /gʲaɫʲə/ → [gʲaɫʲə]

Maintained quantity



Quantity contrasts in Gaelic sonorants may have been maintained alongside quality distinctions until recently

- Ulster (Wheatley & Iosad in preparation)
- South Argyll (Lewin 2023)
- Isle of Man (ibid.)

Initial position in Brythonic: Welsh

CCelt	Radical	Lenited	Gloss
* <i>liakof-</i>	ɫəɡod	iːləɡod	POSS.3SG.M 'mouse'
* <i>rīmā-</i>	ɾiv	iːriv	POSS.3SG.M 'number'

- Similar to the medial reflex for */l/
- Unlike the medial reflex for */r/

Proposed sequence of events

- Phonological quantity contrast
- Enhancement of quantity by quality
- Phonologization of quality
- Qualitative enhancement in strong positions
- Loss of quantity

Scottish Gaelic (Oftedal 1956)

	Coda	Onset
OI <i>bun</i>	p̥ʉn	p̥ʉnə
'bottom'	<i>bun</i>	<i>buine</i> GEN.SG
ON <i>hlunn-</i>	l̥ʉn̥n̥	l̥ʉn̥n̥ən
'launching roller'	<i>lunn</i>	<i>lunnan</i> PL

- Basically the same pattern, with a quality difference
- fortis [N L R] for *nn ll rr
- lenis [n l r] for *n l r

Initial position in Gaelic

Word-initially, singleton sonorants are fortis, except when subject to the initial mutation of lenition.

Old Irish	Radical	Lenited	Gloss
<i>náire</i>	n̥ːaːðə	mə n̥aːðə	POSS.1SG 'shame'
<i>lepaid</i>	ʎapi	mə lapi	POSS.1SG 'bed'
<i>rám</i>	r̥ːáːv	təː r̥áːv	NOM.DU 'oar'

Not in proclitics: [ð̥iəv] 'ever' < OI *riam* 'before, 3SG.M'

Word-medial position in Brythonic

CCelt	Welsh	Gloss
* <i>kanninā-</i>	<i>cennin</i>	kʰenːin 'leek'
* <i>kʷello-</i>	<i>pell</i>	pʰeːɫ 'far'
* <i>karreko/ā-</i>	<i>carreg</i>	kʰarːeg 'stone'

- In this context, quantity is mostly retained
- Especially in Breton: [pɛl], [karɛg]
- Qualitative change in Welsh: *ll* > [ʃ]

The problem

- *Fortis' sonorants generally show up in two positions
- Originally long/geminate ⇒ this seems fine if they are moraic
- Initial position ⇒ even allowing moraic onsets (Topintzi 2010), why would this happen? How does mutation work?

Place as enhancement of sonorant quantity

- West Norse (Noreen 1923, Seip 1955): *l n* and *ll nn* differ in place
- Probably apical *l n*...
 - *fǫlr* 'foul', *man* 'woman', GEN.SG. *fǫlls*, *mans*
 - ... but laminal *ll nn*
 - *fullr* 'full', *mamm* 'mān.ACC', GEN.SG. *fullz*, *mammz*
- Present-day dialects (Kusmenko 1997, Sandøy 1997)
 - ON *l* > [ɫ] ('thick *l*'); ON *ll* > [ʎp]

Transphonologization in Romance

- Well known as a case of transphonologization (Haudricourt & Juillard 1949), cf. Spanish

	Singleton	Geminate
Nasal	MANU	manno
Lateral	PALU	palo
Rhotic	CARU	karo
		PANNU
		BULLIRE
		CARRU
		karo

Iberian Romance: initial position

Also fortis outcomes word-initially (Martinet 1955)

VL	Italian	Castilian	Catalan	Asturian
NIGRU	<i>nero</i>	<i>negro</i>	<i>negre</i>	<i>ñegru</i>
LOCU	<i>luogo</i>	<i>luego</i>	<i>lloc</i>	<i>llueu</i>
ROTA	<i>rota</i>	[r]ueta	[r]oda	[r]ueda

The RR > LL > NN hierarchy

- The hierarchy also shows up in Celtic initial mutation (Humphreys 1972)

Consonant	SE Breton	Welsh	Gaelic
*n-			N ~ n
*l-		ɫ ~ l	L ~ l
*r-	r/χ ~ r	rʰ ~ r	R ~ r

- Isn't this just the sonority hierarchy?
- Brandão de Carvalho (1989): this is the hierarchy in the loss of quantity contrasts in Western Romance

Previous approaches

- Initial 'strengthening' (Martinet 1955, Hock 1992)
- Levelling of sandhi gemination (Cravens 2002)

Proposed approach

- Place differences enhance quality contrasts
- Once place has entered the phonology, it can function independently from quantity
- Key evidence: 'fortis' outcomes by assimilation with no visible link to quantity
 - Welsh **lt > ft*: **melŷion* 'clover', MW *meillion*
 - ScG coda lateral 'fortition': *geal* [kʲaɫ] 'white' < *gel*
- NBI: Morrison (2019): this fortition and moraicity interact opaquely (*[kʲaɫʲ]), and the change in quality follows the establishment of quantity patterns
 - Similar pattern for *n*, but only before *t d*: *lean* [ʎaɫ] 'follow' ~ [ʎaɫʲtʲ] 'followVN' (*[ʎaɫʲtʲpʲ])
 - Laminal assimilation ([pʲtʲ]) > rule generalization in laterals

Place enhancement as fortition

- Found in strong position: initial in lexical word
- Quantitative enhancement would be odd, because sonorant quality is contrastive (just not in initial position); place, on the other hand, might not (yet) be blocked in proclitics! Not initial in the right domain
- Little evidence in Celtic of sandhi gemination (recently van Sluis 2019, Stifter 2023)
- Cravens (2002) has examples of sandhi gemination with place enhancement from Italo-Romance, but the Itero-Romance outcomes seem too regular to have resulted from levelling of these alternations

Conclusion, implications, further questions

- The pattern does not at any stage involve initial lengthening/strengthening: instead, sonorants in strong positions changed place (likely to laminal)
- Bybee & Easterday (2019): glide strengthening involves **manter** changes, but for palatal/labial glides Is this the counterpart of glide strengthening for non-glide coronal sonorants?
- Is sonority relevant? How?
- How did this alternation enter the mutation system?
- Breton (Falc'hun 1951) and Middle Welsh (van Sluis 2019) have been argued to show true short-long alternations in mutation: if true, can the two accounts be reconciled?

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