

## INITIAL MUTATIONS IN CELTIC

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There is a striking parallelism between the origin and development of some of the initial consonants in Gilyak and in Celtic. Old Celtic must have had a system of allophonic alternation between long (and strong) and short (and weak) consonants. As a general rule the long (and strong) quality was the rule in the beginning of the group, whereas the short (and weak) occurred in intervocalic position. Both qualities appeared in consonant clusters according to special rules.<sup>1</sup>

In the Irish group the short and weak forms of the stops: *b, d, g, k, t, m*, and the sibilant *s*, the liquid *L* (strong, long *l*), the dental nasal *N* and the vibrant *R* were further weakened, the first six into fricatives *v, ð, τ, χ, p, ̃v, h, l, n, r*, whereas *w* disappeared. As the strong *w* developed into *f* there arose an alternation *f*: zero which entered into the pattern *b:v, d:ð, etc.* When *p* was adopted into the language through British and Latin influence *f* became the 'weak' representative of *p*. The liquid, the vibrant and the dental nasal retained the old character of the alternation which still remains in some of the modern dialects as far as *l* and *n* are concerned.

In Brittonic the voiceless short (and weak) stops: *p, t, k* do not become fricatives, but voiced stops: *b, d, g*. The weak form of *g* disappears and to the Irish alternation *f*: zero Welsh has *gw:w*.

These developments of the short (and weak) consonants did not only occur in the interior of the word but also in the interior of the syntactic group so that the word might have an initial alternating between two forms. With the disappearance of final vowels, the changed initial served to indicate syntactic dependence, e.g., O. Ir. *di chetbuid* 'two senses': *cétbaid, cétbuid* 'sense,' M. Welsh *kaer uawr* 'a large city: *gwr mawr* 'a big man' (*kaer*, a feminine noun, having ended in a vowel). Welsh thus has a regular alternation *c:g, t:d, p:b, g:zero, d:ð, b:v, ll:l, rh:r, m:v*.

1. Cf. my article: *Consonant Quantity in Celtic* (N. T. S. XVII, pp. 102-118).

The loss of a final nasal also gives rise to initial mutations. In Old Irish an original *n* is prefixed to an initial vowel or *d*, an *m* to *b* and *ɣ* to *g*. Later *nd*, *mb*, and *ɣg* are assimilated to *n* (*N*), *m*, *ɣ*. The voiceless stops are turned into the mediae *g*, *d* and later *p* into *b*. For *f* the result is bilabial *v*—that is *w* remains as a velarized bilabial *v* and is not changed into *f* as initially.<sup>2</sup> The development *-nk-*, *-nt-* > *-g-*, *-d-* is found also internally. As the *n* is prefixed to an initial vowel, initial mutated *g*, *d* and *b* must be phonemically interpreted as *n+k*, *t*, *p*.

Similarly a final consonant was assimilated to an initial consonant of a following stressed word so that the initial consonant was geminated, e.g. O. Ir. *inna*—*mmaccu* 'the sons' (acc. pl. masc. *inna* < \**sindōs*). This initial mutation, which meant three degrees of consonant quantity, disappeared already in Old Irish.

Middle Irish and Modern Irish show that the final *s* of some of the forms of the article was prefixed to an initial stressed vowel. This has resulted in the prefixation of *t* in the nominative singular masculine of a word beginning in a vowel and of *h* in the plural masculine and the genitive singular and nominative plural feminine in Modern Irish, e.g. *in t-úan* 'the lamb' (\**(s)ind-h-*), *na h-uain* 'the lambs,' *na h-áite* 'of the place,' *na h-áiteacha* 'the places.' Similarly an *h* is found in Welsh e.g. *y h-enw* 'her name.'

In Brittonic the nasal mutation resulted in a voiceless nasal+*h* in the case of the voiceless stops, and in nasals in the case of the voiced, e.g. Middle Welsh *vygkynghor* (= *vy nghynghor*) 'my counsel,' *vy nhat* 'my father,' *vy mhen* 'my head,' *vy nggwely* 'my bed,' *vy nyvot* 'my coming,' *vy maraf* 'my beard' (from *dyvod* 'coming' and *baraf* 'beard').

Corresponding to the Old Irish gemination (or lengthening) in the stressed initial syllable after a preceding word originally ending in a consonant, one finds in Welsh the spirants *ch*, *th*, *ph* instead of the stops. The aspiration of the extra strong (and long) stops has been strengthened in order to distinguish them from the ordinary voiceless strong (and long) stops and this has led to the anticipation of the aspiration, e.g. Middle Welsh *tri chantref* 'three cantreds,' *tri pheth* 'things,' *chwe thorth* 'six loaves' (these numerals ended originally in a consonant).

As in Gilyak the disappearance, in the course of the history of the language, of a proclitic element may extend the use of the initial mutation

2. Cf. Thurneysen, *A Grammar of Old Irish*, § 236.



outside the interior of a syntactic group. In Modern Irish the proclitic *do* of the preterite disappears and the mutation of the initial consonant becomes the sign of the preterite. e.g. in the dialect of Torr. Donegal: *ʃi:l'əməd* 'we think': *hi:l'əməd* 'we thought' (*ʃ* designates a palatal *s*, *d* a palatal *d*, *l* a palatalized *l*). Usually the difference is accompanied also by different endings, e.g. *ʃi:l'iN* *ʃiv* 'you think': *hi:L* *ʃiv* 'you thought' (*L* and *N* are palatal long consonants occurring here according to the sandhi rules, the first for ordinary *l*, the second for ordinary *N*).

Also in Welsh there are cases where the mutation has been extended outside the original syntactic group. The object of a verb is regularly subjected to lenition (that is the mutation *p, t, k* > *b, d, g*, etc.), e.g. Middle Welsh: *y gwelynt uarchawc* 'they saw a horseman' (from *marchawc*). The same is the case with the subject if it follows the verb, e.g. *ny mynnei Gaswallawn y lad ynteu* 'Caswallawn did not desire to slay him'.

It will be seen from this short survey, which could give only the main important facts, that the Celtic development is late; the final syllables were lost probably about 500 A.D. Any historical connexion between the Celtic and the Gilyak facts is excluded. At the most a linguist with a vivid imagination might see in them the action of substrata tendencies, but as such a statement cannot be made more precise it has little interest.