

The phonology of reduplication in Old Irish

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Reduplication occurs in the Old Irish verbal system as a strategy of stem formation for the future and preterite. Old Irish distinguishes weak verbs, often causative or denominative in origin and quite uniform in their flexion, from strong verbs, which are inherited and vary widely in their stem formation. In addition, there is a class of hiatus verbs, grouped with the weak verbs by Thurneysen (1946) and as a separate class by McCone (1987). For strong and hiatus verbs, reduplication is the predominant strategy of stem formation in the future, and is the most common strategy in the preterite as well. This paper gives a phonological account of the various reduplication patterns in both stem formations.

In the Old Irish future, three of the four attested patterns — the reduplicated future, the s-future and the ē-future — have their origin in reduplication. However, the ē-future is productive in the language and has spread to other verbs, meaning that it cannot be analysed as a reduplicated formation at the synchronic level. The reduplicated future and the s-future, on the other hand, can be described in terms of reduplication of the a-subjunctive and s-subjunctive stems respectively. As regards the preterite, there are a variety of reduplicated preterite formations, often known as the suffixless preterite. The ā-preterite may also have its origin in reduplication, but cannot be analysed as such synchronically.

Until recently, standard accounts of Old Irish phonology have described a consonant system of around forty members, with a *two-way* ‘colour’ contrast between palatalised and non-palatalised pervading the entire system. The vowel system, meanwhile, was analysed as consisting of *eight* short vowels and diphthongs and up to twelve long vowels and diphthongs. However, recent work has revived the earlier postulate of a *three-way* distinction in consonant colour (McCone 2014; Hock 2015), which in Anderson (2014) is framed in the context of a *two-member* vertical short vowel system.

Under the traditional account, there are a considerable number of reduplicated formations that appear to be irregular, particularly those built on roots beginning with a surface vowel. Under the assumption of a vertical vowel system, however, most of these irregularities disappear. In common with other vertical vowel systems (e.g. Marshallese in Bender 1968; many Northwest Caucasian languages in Colarusso 1988), long vowels and diphthongs in Old Irish can be seen as combinations of a short vowel plus a glide, or abstract consonant, i.e. /vø/, while initial vowels can be understood to be combinations of abstract consonant plus vowel, i.e. /øv/. Under this analysis, the future reduplication patterns can be described with the template $C^x_1(C)vC_2^- \rightarrow C'_1\text{ə}C^x_1vC_2^-$, while the preterite pattern has the template $C^x_1(C)vC_2^- \rightarrow C^x_1\text{a}C_1(C)vC_2^-$. Roots beginning with surface vowels and those beginning in consonants can be described in the same manner.

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