Foreword

This study on the clause types morphologically distinguished in the Old Irish verbal complex was initially an investigation aimed at explaining the origin of the difference between absolute and conjunct in Old Irish verbal morphology, a fairly recurrent research topic in Celtological studies. The development of the descriptive implications associated with that basically diachronic issue has led to a thorough investigation of the so-called ‘absolute / conjunct’ opposition, as well as other morphological elements and syntactic structures related in one or another way to clause typing.

The present study is mainly concerned with the systematic description of clause typing in Old Irish and it refrains from proposing a diachronic explanation for all the formal features considered. Such a diachronic investigation would probably need a text at least as long as the present one, but this limitation is advisable not only for practical reasons. Instead, only a limited set of phenomena related to clause typing will be discussed from the diachronic perspective, i.e. relative nasalization, suppletion in the paradigms of the present indicative of the copula and substantive verbs, and some specific uses of pronominal forms which are related to clause typing.

The descriptive discussion of the morphological expression of clause typing in the Old Irish verbal complex represents a topic in itself that may be of interest to those scholars interested in the morphosyntax of the Insular Celtic languages, especially of Old Irish, but also to those linguists who are interested in clause typing, in particular in its morphological expression and in the various ways in which this category interacts with other linguistic domains. The main ideas proposed in this work are, first, that Old Irish has a morphological paradigm of six clause types, declarative, relative, wh-interrogative and polar (or yes/no) interrogative, responsive and imperative clause types, and, second, that the morphosyntactic expression of these clause types must be analyzed in its relation to pragmatically marked syntactic structures, the domain of syntactic subordination, as well as distinctions in predicate types (i.e. transitive and intransitive predicates).

 Needless to say, the Old Irish forms and structures dealt with in this study have already been discussed by other scholars. However, in my opinion one of the important contributions of this monograph is the systematic consideration of the theoretical and structural implications of the existence of a paradigm of clause types in Old Irish, a point that has been overlooked in studies on Old Irish verbal morphology and, especially, in those dealing with the absolute / conjunct problem. The general statement of Austin (1962: 1) in the introductory part of his pathbreaking study on speech acts may be applied to this specific aspect of Old
Irish morphosyntax: “The phenomenon to be discussed is very widespread and obvious, and it cannot fail to have been already noticed, at least here and there, by others. Yet I have not found attention paid to it specifically.”

The systematic consideration of clause types in Old Irish verbal morphology raises important issues about the distribution and use of the declarative clause type forms in some specific subordinate clauses, and on the special place of relative nasalization with respect to other clause type markers, but the very assumption of a paradigm of clause types leads to a systematic analysis of the formal procedures used in the expression of clause types, as well as other morphological and syntactic elements that are related to that grammatical category. To the extent that this study may be compared to Thurneysen’s *A Grammar of Old Irish*, the most direct consequence of the study on Old Irish clause types in the verbal complex is the theoretically coherent and comprehensive analysis of a number of points that in Thurneysen’s master piece are dealt with here and there in (sometimes quite) separate chapters.

This is partly due to the fact that clause typing cannot properly be accounted for without considering decidedly syntactic and pragmatic issues. This is particularly clear in Old Irish, in which the regular clause initial position of the verbal complex entails a pragmatically marked character for every sentential ordering in which an NP or any other syntactic constituent precedes the finite verb. Thus, for reasons that will become clear in the development of the book, it is necessary to pay special attention to the two main pragmatically marked word orders of Old Irish sentential syntax, i.e. cleft-sentences and left-dislocation, and as a further element intrinsically related to all those morphosyntactic elements, to the Old Irish personal pronouns, in both their tonic and affixal variants. This monograph therefore constitutes a contribution to the study of the Old Irish syntax, one of the neglected areas in the study of this language, as McCone (1996b: 18) noted some twenty five years ago.

Certainly, one could argue that the elements analyzed in this study have been selected due to the fact that they are precisely the basic protagonists of the diachronic explanation put forward by the author for some specific clause types. No doubt, a certain selection of topics to be included in this study has been necessary, and in fact some partial studies originally developed as separate chapters or sections have been taken out and reformulated as independent papers. Apart from that, not all the Old Irish verbal grammatical categories other than clause typing have been explored in this study: categories such as person, number, diathesis, mood and polarity have been taken into account at different stages and more or less systematically, and I think that their bearing for the descriptive and diachronic analysis is beyond doubt. However, other verbal categories such as
tense and aspect have not been dealt with and, though it seems clear to me that they are less relevant for the point at issue, this absence must be acknowledged.

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