

Review: Grammatica, Gramadach *and*
Gramadeg: *Vernacular Grammar and*
Grammarians in Medieval Ireland and Wales
(Hayden and Russell)



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Celtica 30 (2018), 223–229

DOI: 10.58480/SCS-e4f88-n68wn

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Grammatica, Gramadach and Gramadeg: *Vernacular Grammar and Grammarians in Medieval Ireland and Wales*. Edited by Deborah Hayden and Paul Russell. Studies in the History of the Language Sciences 125. John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, 2016. xvi + 226 pp. €105. ISBN 978-90-272-4616-5. Also available as e-book ISBN 978-90-272-6715-3.

The scope of this collection of essays is much wider than the title might suggest, but only if we limit our idea of what constitutes ‘grammar’ to its modern core of phonology, morphology and syntax. In medieval usage, however, *grammatica* encompassed everything from the acquisition of basic literacy all the way up to advanced literary interpretation. This broad range, and the centrality of medieval *grammatica* to textual culture, are reflected in the variety of themes discussed in this volume.

Elizabeth Boyle, ‘Allegory, the *áes dána* and the liberal arts in medieval Irish literature’, examines three texts, the *dindshenchas* of Loch Garman, *Echtra Cormaic* and the Latin poem *Mentis in excessu* attributed to Bishop Patrick (possibly but not certainly the bishop of Dublin who died in 1084). She sets out to show that medieval Irish texts, in the vernacular as well as in Latin, may be read allegorically, and that in some cases at least an allegorical reading was expected. She starts from the well-founded assumption that the authors of medieval Irish literature were literate and had undergone an ecclesiastical education in Latin which would have encompassed the interpretation of literature (*enarratio poetarum*); such *enarratio* gave a prominent place to allegory, as we know from numerous sources, and it served as training for the exegesis of scripture. This leads her to look for evidence for allegory within the texts themselves. The difficulty is, as always with allegory, legitimacy. We are free to read any text allegorically if we so wish. However, for a historically founded reading we want to show that this was a way in which the text was read by its first audience, or at least a way that was familiar and available to that audience. Boyle cuts through the conundrum by choosing texts in which the allegory is explicit: the visions in the Loch Garman *dindshenchas* and the tale of Cormac are explained within the texts, while the Latin poem is heavily glossed. In each case the allegory is self-referential in that it relates to the poetic art and its access to knowledge. Boyle’s readings are rich and intriguing. Perhaps the most important point — and likely to be the most controversial — is that the supposedly pagan settings and content of medieval Irish texts should be read as metaphorical, figurative and allegorical ways of exploring the Christian world in which the authors lived, closely comparable to the use of the classical mythological inheritance by other medieval European authors. The implications are serious: if we would not cite the Old French *romans d’Antiquité* in reconstructing Greco-Roman religious thought, should we use Irish texts of a similar date as even indirect sources for pre-Christian belief? A point touched on only briefly (p. 13), but which demands more thought, is the audience of the texts. Would they need to be as trained in *enarratio* as the authors, or was there some lower level at which they were able to enjoy them? More studies

of reception are needed in early Irish studies. Finally: what about texts where the allegory is not explicit?

Deborah Hayden discusses ‘Cryptography and the alphabet in the “Book of Ádhamh Ó Cianáin”’, i.e. NLI G2–3, of the fourteenth century. Much of the contents of the book are grammatical, and Hayden picks out two small pieces which turn out to have far-reaching implications. The first is a quatrain in a simple cipher, in which dots are substituted for the vowels. Hayden identifies it as part of a poem in *Tochmarc Treblainne*, and has also discovered it, in plain text and in cipher, in two sixteenth-century copies of *Auraicept na nÉces*. She argues (p. 45) that it passed in some way from G3 to these copies; an implication is that it might be worth searching G2–3 for further additions to the *Auraicept* tradition. She also identifies the source of the cipher: the Carolingian *De inventione linguarum*, which, she argues, may also have contributed material to the *Auraicept* tradition. The other item is a rather baffling list of numerical values for the Latin letters — baffling because many of the values are repeated and have no discernible rationale. Again, the source turns out to be Continental, for some manuscripts of the *De inventione linguarum* contain similar lists. In an appendix Hayden edits a Middle Irish poem on the numerical values of the letters which offers a valuable insight into the pronunciation of the letter names in Ireland.

The next two contributions focus on particular technical terms in Irish grammatical discourse. Erich Poppe discusses the concept of the word in medieval Ireland. As is the case elsewhere, it transpires that the concept was complex and variable and worked on more than one level. Poppe is particularly concerned with the *mot phonétique*, that is, the idea of the word as a group of syllables clustered around a main accent. In this paradigm, clitics such as the article, prepositions and the copula form a unit with the stressed word that follows them. There is certainly some evidence for this concept in medieval Irish, not least in the fact that clitics were regularly written continuously with the following stressed word. Poppe shows, moreover, that grammarians were aware of the concept: it can be seen both in their search for ‘the longest word in Irish’ ([*in focul as mo isan Gaedilc*]) and in their terminology. However, his examination of the various terms corresponding to ‘word’ reveals a more mixed picture, in which the lexical word also had an important place.

Pierre-Yves Lambert explores the various words for ‘sense, meaning, signification’ in the Old Irish glosses, in particular Milan and St Gall. The main words are *cíall*, *intliucht*, *inne*, but others mentioned are *séns* or *séis* and *folad*. The St Gall glosses are examined separately from the Milan glosses, and some distinctions in usage emerge, reflecting the different kinds of text being glossed, grammatical and exegetical.

Anders Ahlqvist, ‘The verbal paradigms in *Auraicept na nÉces*’, discusses two examples of the conjugation of Irish verbs from the canonical, Old Irish section of the *Auraicept*. He gives transcriptions and colour images of the manuscript witnesses, all of which are quite late; some of the images are sharp, though a few appear slightly blurred. The verbal paradigms are found embedded in a longer section on *etargaire*, a term which appears to cover all (or at

least multiple) areas of grammar in which distinctions of grammatical category are drawn. It is perhaps not surprising that verbal morphology is less developed in the *Auraicept* tradition than nominal, for the much greater distance between Irish and Latin in the verbal system was likely to pose an obstacle for medieval grammarians, as noted already by Calder (*Auraicept na nÉces: The Scholars' Primer* (Edinburgh, 1917), xxiii). Nevertheless, even this very small piece shows the identification of active and passive and of the three persons and two numbers. It is notable, however, that the passive forms (apart from the distinctive third-person) include *notae augentes*, whereas the active forms, which are already fully marked for person and number, do not — as if the Irish grammarian were seeking as close an analogue as possible to the fully marked passive endings of Latin.

Liam Breatnach, 'The glossing of the Early Irish law tracts', broadens the discussion from grammatical literature in the modern sense to other texts which were analysed in the medieval period using the techniques of *grammatica*. The oldest law texts were provided with glosses and commentary as early as the Old Irish period. Breatnach demonstrates how these genres of metatext derive from the techniques of Latin *grammatica* as applied both to literary works and to scriptural exegesis. He continues with Middle Irish glossing, identifying and discussing various different types of gloss. Of particular note is etymological glossing, and here Breatnach, building on the work of Rolf Baumgarten, provides an important corrective to the dismissal of Isidorian etymologizing so common in earlier scholarship. There is also a valuable discussion of the relationship between text and gloss and of how the glosses themselves were read. This chapter forms an excellent introduction to the evolution of Irish legal literature in the centuries after the composition of the primary tracts.

Chapters 7–10 move from Ireland to Wales. In 'Teaching between the lines: grammar and *grammatica* in the classroom in early medieval Wales', Paul Russell examines three Latin texts glossed in Welsh: the colloquy known as *De raris fabulis*, a copy of Book 1 of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria*, and the Cambridge Juvencus manuscript. He convincingly shows that the glossing was in each case meant to facilitate a close literal comprehension of the text and that the three could have been used consecutively in learning Latin: the colloquy during the large-scale acquisition of grammatical forms and vocabulary, the Ovid as a first approach to Latin verse, and the Juvencus for advanced study in which the intellectual and spiritual content comes to the fore. Russell's approach vindicates the need to consider vernacular glossing in its full context, taking full account both of the primary Latin text as well as the (much more numerous) Latin glosses that accompany the vernacular ones — an approach illustrated on a bigger scale in his recent monograph, *Reading Ovid in Medieval Wales*. It is not suggested, of course, that the three texts were so used in any one school, but rather that they represent isolated survivals of the kinds of texts that were used at their respective stages in the learning process. This raises the intriguing, but probably unanswerable, question of just how well-equipped early Welsh churches were with study aids like these. Are the survivors the tip of a very much larger iceberg? A priest might get through the

liturgy with much less knowledge of Latin than these texts would provide, but it is hard to see how genuinely competent users of the language could be generated without such works (or indeed to see that such users would be needed in the absence of libraries of texts for them to study). There are some misprints on pp. 136–7: what were angle brackets in the original edition appear as *á* and *ñ* here.

Thomas Charles-Edwards offers an important and highly technical discussion of ‘The Welsh bardic grammars on *Litterae*’. A detailed comparison with the Latin source used to construct this section of the bardic grammars, Donatus’ *Ars Maior*, brings out the differences introduced by the Welsh grammarians. Their doctrine was heavily influenced by metrical concerns, especially the classification of diphthongs (which affects rhyme and half-rhyme) and the treatment of epenthetic vowels in syllabification. Charles-Edwards shows how such interests overrode the phonologically based account of Donatus. Why the Welsh texts intrude a discussion of the metrical implications of epenthetic vowels into Donatus’ account of the letters is not explained. It is worth noting, however, that Donatus mentions metrical peculiarities in the case of his liquids *l*, *r*, and *s* and *f*, employing the phrase *faciunt communem syllabam*, and this may have inspired a Welsh grammarian to introduce the subject of *toddi* (the ignoring of epenthetic vowels in counting syllables) in the analogous place in his grammar, since it makes a ‘common syllable’ out of two (of course that is not what Donatus meant by *communis*, but all we are looking for here is a trigger).

Charles-Edwards’ discussion of how the Welsh grammarians reinterpreted the *liquidae* is illuminating. As he notes, the result was not entirely coherent. The list of *llythyr tawdd* manages to embrace all relevant sound combinations that generate epenthetic vowels: these are stop + *n*, *l*, *r*; *l* + *m*, *l* + *v*, *r* + *m*, *r* + *v*; *dd* + *v* (assuming that the Grammarians’ *f* = /v/). However, *s* does not deserve its place, and the failure to distinguish *d* = /d/ from *d* = /ð/ injects further intellectual unclarity. It should be noted that the combination vowel + liquid + liquid is not given just to accommodate *d* (cf. p. 156) but was needed also for such words as *toryf*, *helym*. The term *tawdd* illustrates the difficulty of pinning down the meanings of medieval Welsh grammatical terms. Another difficult word is *talgron*. I am not convinced that *talgron* applied originally only to diphthongs ending in /u/. The Grammarians use the term for syllables containing a single vowel, irrespective of how many consonants follow, in contrast to *lleddf* ‘tapering’ syllables which contain a diphthong whose second element is /i/ or /ɨ/. Note that such distinctions as *gŵyr* / *gwŷr* are also described as *lleddf* and *talgron*, and are equally vital for rhyme, but do not involve /u/-diphthongs. It is thus far from certain that the ‘round-endedness’ implied by *talgron* refers to lip-rounding. The meaning may rather be ‘abruptly cut off’, in contrast to the tapering out of a *lleddf* sound. The puzzle is why the /u/ of the /u/-diphthongs was felt to be analogous to a consonant, leading to their classification as *talgron*, whereas the /i/ or /ɨ/ of the *lleddf* diphthongs was felt to taper off gradually. If we accept the Grammarians’ own definition of *talgron* then they are undoubtedly correct in saying that *mydyr* contained two such

syllables, *my* and *dyr*. Then the monosyllabic pronunciations of such words might be felt to be *lleddf* in that they did not come to a neat conclusion like a *talgron* syllable. The different usages of *lleddf* in the Grammars warn us that aesthetic perceptions were involved as much as intellectual analysis. There are more such aesthetic judgements in the grammatical triads, which speak of 'easily declaimed' and 'hard-to-declaim' diphthongs and of syllables that are 'ugly and harsh to declaim'. The issue recurs below in Parry Owen's chapter.

Finally, Charles-Edwards also offers a highly ingenious explanation of the apparently quixotic decision of the Peniarth 20 grammar to use the symbol *q3* for /ð/. There are far-reaching consequences for the 'prehistory' of the grammar which will need to be further considered; the textual relations of the extant versions seem to me to be far from clear.

Paul Russell on 'The poetic triads in *Gramadegau Penceirddiaid*' is brief but full of insights. He identifies a division between the first part of the grammar, which is based on the Latin grammatical tradition (and chiefly Donatus, as we saw above), and the second, on metres and the role of the poet, and the triads, which is 'specifically Welsh and poetical without any correspondence in the Latin grammatical tradition' (p. 163). The division is structural as well as based on content, since the Latinizing section employs mainly binary divisions, whereas the remainder prefers divisions into three; explicitly so in the triads, but Russell shows that the triadic structure is widespread elsewhere, especially in the subdivisions of poetry and in the section on metres. In contrast, the instructions for the praise of individuals return to the binary, suggesting to Russell that an unknown, Latinate source may have been used (p. 173). This might be suspected too on other grounds, since the section does not seem to be closely based on actual poetic practice as opposed to abstract theorizing, and it would be satisfying to be able to identify a source. It is generally believed that the Peniarth 20 version is a revision of something close to what is preserved in the other early manuscripts. Russell's analysis of the triads provides some support for this in that the Peniarth 20 triads include many additional items and in structure have a stronger pedagogical focus. More detailed discussions of this kind are needed to try to resolve the problem of how the early texts are related to one another. There is a useful section on the place of triads in other spheres of medieval Welsh learning, and also on the term *cainc* 'branch', which Russell argues arose within pedagogical discourse and only subsequently found its most famous application in the Four Branches of the Mabinogi. The implication would be that it meant nothing more than 'subdivision of a greater whole'.

Ann Parry Owen, finally, provides a very welcome edition and discussion of *Gramadeg Gwysanau*, an abbreviation and updating of her Welsh article which appeared in *Llên Cymru* for 2010. *Gramadeg Gwysanau* is one of the discoveries of medieval Welsh literature in recent years, a fragment of poetic instruction not textually related to any of the extant grammars. The text (a single bifolium) is difficult to judge since it is evidently a small portion of a much larger whole. Nevertheless, I am doubtful whether it was ever conceived as a grammar as such. The unsystematic presentation suggests that the

writer may never have intended to produce a fair copy. ‘*Gramadeg*’ *Gwysanau* looks more like a set of notes drawn from various sources over time, perhaps even lecture notes taken down from the lips of a teacher. That would account too for the use of the less formal *anglicana* script rather than book hand, for the reference to the poet Iolo Goch as a contemporary practitioner, and for the lively comparisons between the art of the poet and those of other craftsmen. Some statements echo ones found in the mainstream bardic grammars — such as some of the doctrine regarding the values of individual letters — while much else is unique. If this is true, then *Gramadeg Gwysanau* allows us a rare glimpse into the medieval bardic classroom.

There is much in this text that repays attention. It shows a notable awareness of change in poetic practice over time. Another fascinating topic is the transmission of poetry. *Gramadeg Gwysanau* explicitly refers to learning poems from written copies, but only as a possibility (*os ar lythyr y dysgir hi*). Furthermore, instructions are given on how to write clearly so that the performance of the poem be not impaired. But there is an equally clear reference to learning from oral performance (*y datkanv yn vchel groyw ... val y gallo dnyo[n] hydysc y gwy[b]ot a’e dysgv*). And it reveals a realistic understanding of the abilities of the average audience: ‘make sure the last couplet of an *englyn* is good and to the point because that’s the bit they remember’.

An important point of orthography is that *Gramadeg Gwysanau* advocates the use of *rr-*, *Rr-* for initial /r^h/. It is a spelling common in the fifteenth century, but there are very sporadic examples from the fourteenth alongside the overwhelmingly usual *r-*. The grammarian describes words that begin with this sound as *trwm* ‘heavy’. Normally *trwm* applies to double or heavy *-nn*, *-rr* at the end of a syllable, in distinction to single *-n*, *-r*. This seems like a creative extension of its meaning to provide a technical term for the previously unanalysed phonemic distinction between /r^h/- and /r/-, rather than a misunderstanding of the application of *trwm*, as argued by Parry Owen. If /r^h/ were indeed perceived as a ‘heavy’ or more powerful sound in comparison to /r/, that might account for the choice of *rr-* to represent it, which has never been explained until now. Admittedly initial /r^h/ and final /r:/ were not the same sound, but the *rr-* spelling does suggest that an analogy was drawn between them. Creative application of existing terminology is also seen in the use of *camosodiad* for the use of *cynghanedd lusz* in the last line of an *englyn*. Since *camosodiad* simply means that something is put where it should not be, and indeed later grammars use it for a great variety of other *faux-pas*, it might be better to assume that the author (or his source) was well-versed in the use of the term and saw a valid analogy between this metrical fault and others, rather than that he was an amateur with an incomplete grasp of the subject. He may have been, of course, but even if so, it is evident that Welsh grammatical terminology was highly flexible and adaptable, something we have already seen above in discussing Charles-Edwards’s chapter.

This is an excellent collection. It cannot pretend to be comprehensive by any means, but as an illustration of the rich material available in the Irish and Welsh grammatical traditions, it would be hard to better.

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The Poems of Dafydd ap Gwilym. Translated by Joseph P. Clancy. Brown Dog Books, Bath, 2016. 390 pp. £17.50. ISBN 978-1-78545-089-1.

These literary translations of the complete poetry of Dafydd ap Gwilym are the first to be based on the recent new edition which was published online in 2007 and in print in 2010 as *Cerddi Dafydd ap Gwilym*, edited by Johnston et al. However, being the fruit of many years' labour, they understandably also bear witness to the continuing influence of the previous standard edition, Thomas Parry's *Gwaith Dafydd ap Gwilym* (1952). For those who came to know Dafydd ap Gwilym's poetry through Parry's edition it has been no small matter to come to terms with a new text, emotionally as well as intellectually, and it is to Joseph Clancy's credit that he was able to reshape his translation project to take account of the latest scholarship. These translations represent his personal understanding of the poetry, which inevitably reflects both the new and the old editions.

The canon is that of the new edition, including the three newly added poems and excluding those now deemed not to be Dafydd's genuine work, with the exception of one to the song thrush retained by way of comparison with another on the same subject (but I suspect also out of reluctance to lose such a charming nature lyric). The source texts seem to be mostly those of the new edition, but line-order occasionally follows Parry, as do a few lines of dubious authenticity which are retained, most notably four towards the end of the depiction of Morfudd's old age which are a stray passage from the poem about the hare but will, I fear, have a long after-life due to their association with this emotional highpoint in Parry's edition.

In one important sense this collection is independent of both editions of the Welsh texts in that it presents the poems in an entirely new order, building on suggestions by R. Geraint Gruffydd and others to offer a tentative chronological sequence rather than grouping by genre. This is a significant critical interpretation of Dafydd's work, backed up by a thoughtful introductory essay, and it produces some interesting new juxtapositions, such as bringing together all the poems relating to Gwynedd, and those in which the poet is in a position of exile. It makes a big difference that both religious and praise poems are spread throughout the collection and thus much more central to the work than in their usual position as prelude to the larger body of love and nature poetry. Chronological arrangement could result in a naively literal reading, but that danger is countered by emphasis on the various literary personas which the poet adopts. Nevertheless, I would have liked to have seen more acknowledgement of alternative interpretations, such as the possibility that the description