The fall of *do* and the rise of the linking yod

Andrea Palandri

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THE FALL OF *DO* AND THE RISE OF THE LINKING YOD

Abstract

This article reassesses the historical development of the Early Modern Irish preverbal and infinitival particle *do* and the origin of *dh'* in Irish dialects and Scottish Gaelic. It argues that the traditional pathway *do* > *dho* > *dh'* is problematic and proposes instead a sequence *do* > *a/ø* > *a dh'*, where *dh'* reflects the grammaticalisation of an ahistorical hiatus-filling yod glide heard across word boundaries. The study links the weakening of *do* to metanalysis after dentals (e.g. *cad*, *rud*, *iad*), explains the emergence of ø-relatives in Munster, and compares parallel developments in Manx and Scottish Gaelic. It also examines other repairs to word boundary hiatus and syntactic ambiguity that arise as a consequence of this development, including reborrowing *d'* in northern relatives and the spread of *ag* in infinitival environments.[1]

The historical development of the EMIr preposition *do* **də** to Modern Irish *a* **ə** in infinitive structures such as *X do dhéanamh* > *X a dhéanamh* was briefly discussed by T. F. O'Rahilly who described it as a 'weakening': 'probably as a result of *do* becoming weakened to *a* (pron. **ə**) in speech and being consequently liable to disappear, this use of *do* grew less frequent' (O'Rahilly 1932: 233). It is usually assumed that this 'weakening' consisted of the diachronic stages *do* **də** > *dho* **ɣə** > *'o/a* **ə**, as well as being influenced by the third person possessive masculine *a*, as in *Desiderius*, *mar is éidir a fhaicsin* (O'Rahilly 1941: 270). Interestingly, *do* as a preverbal particle has undergone a parallel development and has gradually all but disappeared except before vowels and lenited *f*, in most dialects. From the fifteenth century we find evidence that *do* had begun to acquire a new function as a leniting relative particle, (Dillon 1962 and Ó Buachalla 1964), probably through analogy with the commonly occurring compound verbs such as *do-ní*, *do-bheir*, *do-chí* etc, as well as with the leniting *do* that marked regular past, imperfect and conditional forms. Ó Buachalla (1964: 110) suggests that the subsequent reduction of the leniting relative particle *do* occurred because '*d-* was lenited (> *dh*) in intervocalic position and after final *-r* and that subsequently the spirant was lost. It could also have been developed by analogy with *atá* and *adeir* where

[1]I would like to thank Seán Ua Súilleabháin, Christopher Lewin and Will Lamb for their valuable comments on draft versions of this article. I am grateful to the editors of *Celtica* and to an anonymous reviewer for further helpful comments and suggestions. I would furthermore like to thank Tomás L. Ó Murchú who pointed out to me anecdotally how past generations of speakers of the Corca Dhuibhne dialect often showed no *dh'* stage. I would also like to thank Art Hughes for encouraging me to pursue some of the ideas explored in this article. His jocular reference to Co. Cork as 'the people's republic of *do*' spurred investigation into the matters discussed below.

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the pretonic particle was already an unstressed *a*.' This framing of the problem agrees with the suggested development stages of infinitive *do* summarised above. It is therefore assumed that dialects that have *dh'* before verbal nouns in infinitive structures, for example *deoch a dh'ól*, have retained historic *do* in a 'weakened' lenited stage. The parallel assumption is that the *dh'* in past tense *(do) dh'ólas deoch*, is simply a lenited form of a reduplicated preverbal particle *do*.

There are some issues with this overall chronology and understanding of the historical development of *do*. Dialects, like those of south-west Munster, that preserve *do* or *d'* also tend to have the *a* or ø stage, but examples of the *dh'* stage in these dialects are generally rare, which, if we adopt the traditional understanding, means that we have recorded evidence in the one dialect of the first and final steps, but not of the intermediary step. Older generations of speakers of some of the dialects where *dh'* is generally the norm today, like in Corca Dhuibhne, sometimes display the *a* stage and sometimes display the *do* stage, but it is the *dh'* stage that is currently expanding far beyond its original remit (e.g. *níor dh'fhan* 'he didn't stay'), at the expense of the *do* and *a* stages. Furthermore, there is an uncomfortable question for dialects that have relative *a d'* before vowels and *f*, like in Connacht and Ulster, i.e. if the *d'* in *an bhean a d'fhan san oileán* is directly passed down from original historic relative *do*, then what is the *a* **ə** vowel that usually precedes it?

Classical Irish	**South-west Munster dialects**	**Corca Dhuibhne and Déise dialects**	**Connacht and Ulster**
Do fhan sé nuair do éirigh sé	Do fhan sé nuair a éirigh sé	(Do) dh'fhan sé nuair a dh'éirigh sé	D'fhan[2] sé nuair a d'éirigh sé
An deoch do bhí sé do ól	*An deoch a bhí sé do/d'/a ól[3]	An deoch a bhí sé a dh'ól/ag ól	An deoch a bhí sé a ól

In the following discussion, I suggest that the historical development is as follows *do* > *a* > *a dh'*, the last step being a grammaticalisation of a hiatus-filling yod glide, a sandhi phenomenon that can be perceived across word boundaries in all Gaelic dialects, e.g. ***ní íosfaidh mé an rud atá sí a iarraidh***, which is interpreted natively by some dialects as *dh'*.

[2]The Irish that was spoken in west Clare regularly had the following pattern, *do d'fhan sé nuair a d'éirigh sé*. I understand the *do d'* formation to be an interdialect innovation (Trudgill 1986: 62 et seq.) based on the historic non-relative *do* + past tense, that re-introduces the elided *d'* form through analogy with the relative form. The spread of the elided *d'* in the relative forms in the dialects of Clare and south Galway is discussed below, and is seen in present and future relative forms such as *cad a d'airíonn tu* **kad ə darʲ iːn tə** (QQTRIN040946c1, 6:40).

[3]This syntax is mostly if not entirely avoided in south-west Munster dialects. The periphrastic construction *an deoch a bhí á (h)ól aige* or *an deoch a bhí aige á (h)ól* is instead preferred (Ua Súilleabháin 1994: 525). Perhaps this periphrastic construction was formed in order to avoid the ambiguities that arise from the fall of *do* discussed in this article.

I have used examples from Canúint, a repository of transcribed sound recordings of Irish dialects compiled from RTÉ Archives available on www.canúint.ie (Palandri et al. 2025), to illustrate the points discussed below. Readers are welcome to listen to and verify these examples by copying the recording ID number into a search engine and going to the timestamp marked in the reference. For this reason, I have transcribed examples in IPA only if my interpretation of their phonology is particularly relevant to the discussion.

Historical and modern dialect evidence

The dialects of Cork are the most conservative in their treatment of the preverbal particle *do*. Not only is it often retained before consonants, but it is also sometimes found in its unelided form before vowels, e.g. *do bhí*, *do bhain*, *do fhéach* and *do fhíodh*, as was recommended by the grammarians of *Irish Grammatical Tracts* (*IGT*) I, §73 (Mac Cárthaigh 2014: 98; Hughes 2013: 188–9). Examples of elided *d'* before front vowels in this region can even resist palatalisation through sandhi, e.g. *d'itheamar*[4] and *d'fhíl*[5] with broad **d** (Ua Súilleabháin 1994: 525). Notably, these are also the regions where we often find a phonologically intact *do* in infinitive construction, as heard in two examples from Canúint: *gurbh fhéidir iad san do fhí*[6] *agus do chasadh* (Peadar Mac Suibhne QQTRIN016118c1, 4:00) and *gach ní eile do dhéanamh dom* (Aodh Ó Tuama OD016950_CD0135_23, 8:25).[7] Yet, in the same south-west Munster dialects that preserve non-relative *do* so well, the regular outcome of the relative particle *do* is *a* before consonants and **ø** before vowels, with relative *do* and *d'* being rarer and being perceived as higher register variants (Ua Súilleabháin 1994: 526). It is important to note at this point that this higher-register *d'* before vowels is simply *d'* and not *a d'*, as in: *a mháthair chneasta an aenmhic d'fhuilig an pháis* (OD017723_CD0928_15c1, 17:35). Similarly, *a* is more widespread than *do* as an infinitive marker, *do* being perceived as a higher register form.

The complete disappearance of *do* as a relative particle before vowels in the everyday informal register of these dialects, henceforth ø-relative,[8] is of particular interest, as noted by Ua Súilleabháin: 'I gcoibhneas díreach is gnáth nach bhfágtar aon rian de mhír choibhneasta roimh ghuta in iarthar Chorcaí agus chomh fada ó thuaidh le hUíbh Ráthach ar a bheag' (Ua Súilleabháin 1994: 525–6). Some examples from Canúint are: *conas fhéatainn* (QQTRIN016188c1, 5:49) and *nuair fhéach* (QQTRIN011960c1, 10:00) and *an chéad duine éirigh* (QQTRIN011960c1, 6:03). The development therefore appears to be that, even though *do* holds strong as an independent preverbal particle, it is being eroded by *a* or **ø** in relative and infinitive position.

[4]See *LASID* II, question 303 points 8, 10, 15, 16, 17 and 19.

[5]Spelled *duíl* in Ó Murchadha (1932: 221 n. 1).

[6]Pronounced **də ʔˈiː**.

[7]This use of *do* is occasionally found in other regions, but is less common and more high register. For Corca Dhuibhne see Ó Sé (2000: 367); for Iorras Aithneach see Ó Curnáin (2007: 1544 n. 1).

[8]As coined by Hughes (2013: 97) 'The Munster ø-relative'.

Manx appears to have been similarly conservative in its treatment of *do* (spelled *dy*), and while the periphrastic nature of Late Spoken Manx means that examples of relative past and secondary tenses are hard to come by, a phonologically intact and leniting **də** *dy* could be still heard in the twentieth century in infinitive constructions, e.g. **də hɔdˊəm ɑrənˊ** (*do thuitim orainn*) (Broderick 1984: 87). In Manx texts from the eighteenth century however, we find *dy* (= *do*) is used in infinitive, past/conditional/past habitual and relative constructions, beside a 'weakened' leniting schwa form, **ə** *y*. Such was the force of this leniting form **ə** *y*, that the relative forms of the conditional/past habitual inflection of verbs, such as *oddagh* (cognate with *fhéadadh*), appear to have influenced the non-relative forms, so that in Manx we find non-relative *oddin* and *cha voddin* (cognate with *fhéadainn, cha bhféadainn*).[9] A parallel between Manx and the Irish of south-west Munster today is visible therefore in the cognate phrases *kys oddagh* and *conas fhéadadh*, where *do* is substituted by *a* and the *a* is elided into the first vowel of the verb, leaving only lenition behind.

DO > *A* BEFORE CONSONANTS

I would suggest that the historic preverbal particle *do* **də** was reanalysed as **ə** in relative position due primarily to resegmentation or metanalysis with commonly-occurring words ending in **d**.[10] The most likely starting points for the disappearance of relative *do* are the *IGT*-proscribed *cad* (*IGT* 1, §16) and *céard* (EMIr *creud* < *crét*), *fa(i)d*, the pronoun *iad* in cleft constructions as well as the noun *rud* (OIr *rét*). Fifteenth century manuscript examples such as *cat do-ghén feasta* (Laud. 610, fol. 24ra10), *cat do-beir ort* (Laud. 610, fol. 47va41), *cred do-dhēntaí re ser Gilda* (Egerton 1781, p. 19r16), *cad d'fhoghain* (Laud. 610, fol. 53 vby) show how the component parts for this reanalysis were already present over five hundred years ago. From the birth of *cad*, for which see Quin (1966), high-frequency phrases such as *cad/rud do bhí*, *cad/rud do tharla*, *céard/rud do rinne*, etc., would have allowed for the new leniting relative particle *do* to be reinterpreted as **ə**: *cad do bhí* > *cad a bhí*. This is, of course, probably also the cause of the copula form *dob* regularly becoming *ab*, as in *cad dob áil leat do?* > *cad ab áil leat do?* The earliest examples of *a* for *do* as a relative preverbal particle are from Scotland, cited by Ó Buachalla (1964: 110), from the Book of the Dean of Lismore (*c.* 1515), which has *nuair a shuidh Fionn* (< *noyr a hwyth Fionn*), *mòr an phèin a chuiris orm* (< *mor in feine a churris orm*). The earliest known examples from Ireland are from almost two centuries later, *gá mhéad a dhligheas mo thíghearna dhíot?* (Ó Domhnaill 1681: 106).[11] Interestingly, the spread of *do* as a relative particle is datable at latest to the first half of the fifteenth century (Dillon 1962: 124), so it is possible that

[9] But past tense *dod* (= *d'fhéad*). A parallel development is found, albeit rarely, in Corca Dhuibhne Irish, and is discussed below under '*d'* > *ø before vowels and f*'.

[10] A commonly cited example of metanalysis in English is ME *a napron* > ModE *an apron*.

[11] This *a* does not appear in the original 1602 edition, which has *ga mheud d'fhiachaibh dhligheas mo thighearna dhíot* (Ó Domhnaill 1602: *Lucas* 16.5).

relative *do* accelerated if not even triggered the birth of relative *a* within a few generations.

In parallel to the above development, *do* in the inherited infinitive construction undergoes the same univerbation with preceding words ending in **d** allowing it to be reanalysed as a leniting **ə**. This time I would suggest *iad* and *read* > *rud* as the starting points for the spread: *ó nach féadtar réad do ríomh air* (Céitinn 1900: 52); *as urusa iad do chur na cciomhne* (Stapleton 1945: 264). The interrogative pronouns *cad* and *céard* may have also played a secondary role here by triggering the infinitive structure with *do*: *crét tuc mo mac do chlódh* (Stokes 1898: 118).[12] Therefore, phrases such as *cad do bhí siad do dhéanamh* become reanalysed as *cad a bhí siad a dhéanamh*.[13]

Presumably, the environment for this reanalysis would have already existed from the birth of the independent object pronoun *iad*, at the end of the Middle Irish period. Furthermore, since relics of homorganic delenition of **ð** in *bheadh siad* **v´et´ ʃəd**, found in Connacht and Ulster, as well as Scottish Gaelic *bhíodh tu* **viɣ tu** or **vi tu** suggest that the northern Gaelic speaking regions may have already been acquiring a greater proclivity for enclitic non-synthetic pronouns before the late Middle Irish phonological development of **ð** > **ɣ** (O'Rahilly 1926: 193; Ó Baoill 1988: 128),[14] we may also add independent subject pronouns *muid/muíd* and *siad* to the list of likely accomplices in the disappearance of northern infinitive *do*. As these gradually replaced the secondary tenses' synthetic endings, *-mis* and *-dis*, as well as past tense endings *-mar* and *-dar*, they would have increased the frequency of fusion of the infinitive *do* with a preceding pronoun ending in *-d*. Indeed, perhaps this may have contributed to the fact that historic infinitive *do* is seldom preserved phonologically as **də** in the regions with a higher frequency of non-synthetic endings, with the exception of Manx.

[12]This periphrasis is commonly used to express *why* in Early Modern Irish: *cad/crét do-bheir ar* X Y *do dhéanamh*, i.e. 'why does X do Y'. It is comparable to the periphrasis used in Scottish Gaelic *dè a chaidh a thogail* 'what was built?'. It could also be used without a verb: *fochtuis in t-iarla do Gyi créd tuc gan mnai e* 'the earl asked Guy why he was without a wife' (Robinson 1908: 82). An echo of this periphrasis is used in the modern language, e.g. *cad a thug abhaile tu?* which sooner means 'why did you come home?' rather than 'what (physical element) brought you home,' although influence from parallel semantic development in English cannot be excluded. The idiom, preserving *do-bheir*, was well known in Cork until recently: *más ea cad a bheir eagla na dlighe ort i dtaobh an phionóis bhig agus tú ag briseadh na dlighe leis an bpionós mór?* (Ua Laoghaire 1913: 51); *cad do bheir cos-nochtaithe í? agus cad do bheir dí mo sgilling do bhreith uaimse …?* (Ua Laoghaire 1904: 13); *D'fhiafruigheadar de cé bhí ann nó cad do bheir ann chomh déidheanach san oidhche é.* (Barrett 1899: 74); *cad a bheir di bheth ann? …* (Ó Briain 1947: s.v. *bherim*); *cad a bheir duit na ba san a leogaint isteach im choill?* (Ó Cróinín 1971: 3). I would like to thank Seán Ua Súilleabháin for providing me with these examples.

[13]On the other hand, northern regions better preserve the syntax of Early Modern Irish *do* in final clauses. Whereas all dialects famously preserve *dul a chodladh* (*do* < *a*), this syntax has remained productive in Ulster, Scotland and Man, so we find *chua muid a chaint leis*, and *thainic siad a theagasc* and Scottish Gaelic *thèid iad a dh'ionnsachadh*. (O'Rahilly 1932: 233).

[14]Evidence for the coming to the fore of analytic forms in northern dialects has been presented by Skerrett (1966) and Ó Baoill (1988).

D' > Ø BEFORE VOWELS AND *F*

Following a word ending in **d** and preceding a verb beginning with a vowel or *f*, the eliding form of *do* **də**, i.e. *d'*, fuses with the preceding consonant and its articulation vanishes entirely, giving us *cad d'ólais? céard d'aire tú? cad d'fhéadfainn?* These pronunciations can still be found in Conamara, as in *céard a d'ól sé* **kˊeːr doːlˊ ʃe** and *céard a d'éirigh* **kˊeːr dˊairˊə** (Ó Curnáin 2007: 438). In south-west Munster, these forms allowed for *d'* before a vowel to simply vanish in all relative positions, thus triggering the birth of the ø-relative, albeit preserving lenition: *cad d'fhéadfainn? > cad fhéadfainn? > conas fhéadfainn?* and *nuair fhéadfainn*.

As with Manx *oddin* (= *fhéadainn*/*fhéadfainn*), some recorded examples from Corca Dhuibhne show how the ø-relative can spread to the non-relative form, in that the preverbal *do/d'* before vowels can also be sporadically omitted in that dialect, albeit rarely: *agus fhiafraíos-sa dho* **agəs ʔiəˈriːsə ɣo** (OD017715_CD0919_46c1, 08:31) and *iompaigh sé uaithi* **ʔuːmpə** (CD0188_22412316_30, 24:27). The ø-relative form is also fossilised in the Munster expression *a imig tharainn* **mˊiˈkarɪnˊ**, as in *an tseachtain seo imigh tharainn* 'last week'.

Munster by-forms *nis* (Ó Sé 2000: 561) and *mig* (< *inis* and < *imigh*) may be further consequences of this overall development, since where non-eliding *do* **də** before vowels remained strong, phrases such as *cad do imig air* **kad ə ˈmˊigˊ erˊ** and *cad do inis sé* **kad ə ˈnˊiʃ e** would allow for the root of the verb to be reanalysed due to the elision not of *do* but of the first short vowel of the verb, i.e. *cad do 'mig air > cad a mig air* and *cad do 'nis sé > cad a nis sé*.

Similarly, and again in parallel to this, the infinitive *do* when following a word ending in *d* vanishes, leaving behind only its lenition on *f*, as in *iad d'ithe > iad ithe*, allowing it to be interpreted as **ø**, *í d'ithe > í ithe*.

THE BIRTH OF YOD, I.E. SLENDER *A DH'*, AS A HIATUS FILLER

A recent article by Davidson and Erker (2014)[15] published results of an experiment that was conducted on fourteen American English monoglots to determine how they handled hiatus in word-internal vowel-vowel sequences (VV:[16] e.g. *kiosk*), across word boundaries (VBV:[17] e.g. *I see otters*) and before glides (VGV:[18] e.g. *I see yachts*). The study determined that speakers were more likely to use glottal stops and voice creaks to resolve VBV, and that they mostly tolerated hiatus in VV environments. The phonological quality of the glides used to resolve VV as opposed to VGV were empirically different when measured on a text grid using PRAAT. This correlates with Cruttenden's (2008) observations that a linking glide /ʲ/ is not the same as a phonemic /j/, a

[15] I would like to thank Brian Ó Curnáin for pointing me in the direction of this article some years ago.

[16] VV is used to abbreviate 'vowel-vowel' sequences.

[17] VBV is used to abbreviate: 'vowel-boundary-vowel' sequences.

[18] VGV is used to abbreviate: 'vowel-glide-vowel' sequences.

difference that can be illustrated with the minimal pairs, e.g. *my ears* and *my years*. The article is important since it challenges the assumptions that American English resolved hiatus with glide insertion, presenting instead evidence that speakers mostly tolerate it and that glottal-stop insertion is the preferred strategy for resolving vowel-vowel sequences across word boundaries, i.e. VBV (Davidson and Erker 2014: 505). Nevertheless, the article had to challenge long-standing assumptions that glides are used in these contexts, showing that 'a percept of a glide-like element' (Davidson and Erker 2014: 501) can develop in our understanding of such sequences.

The situation presented by Davidson and Erker for American English is comparable to that in Irish dialects that do not have a regularised *a dh'* stage, where, if a vowel is not elided, elision, hiatus toleration and sometimes glottal stops seem to be the preferred methods used to resolve VBV contexts where the stressed syllable is a high front vowel.[19] Nevertheless, glides or perceptions thereof can sometimes be heard in vowel to front high vowel sequences in circumstances that do not derive from historic *d'*. Some examples from Canúint are: *ní íocfadh sé* **N´iː ˈjiːkət´ ʃe** (QQTRIN016152: 10:55), and *le iascaireacht* **l´e ʲiəskər´ət** (OD018765_CD1983_nuig1983_19, 05:15) by Seán Ó hEochaidh in south Donegal *chuirfinn á iarraidh* **χir´hin´ ɑː ˈʲiərə** by Tomás Ó Máirtín (OD018362_CD1573_nuig1573_05c1, 01:57), *bhí iallach orainne* **v´iː ʲiələχ orn´ə** by Tomás Breathnach (QQTRIN016170: 11:04) and *ní aontóinn* **n´iː ˈʲeːntoːN´** (OD016950_CD0135_6c1, 00:06) by Johnny Chóil Mhaidhc Ó Coisdealbha, all three from Cois Fharraige.

Various Gaelic dialects have regularised this ahistorical **j** glide before front vowels when the second vowel is stressed. For the Irish of Iorras, Mhac an Fhailigh writes: 'Following the preposition **gə** representing *de/do*, **j** is often inserted before an initial vowel of a noun. In this matter usage varies. The practice is more widespread in Dû Chaocháin than in Faulmore.' (Mhac an Fhailigh 1980: 177).[20] He goes on to cite examples *de aois* **gə jiːʃ**, *de Éire* **gə jeːr´ə**, *de fhear* **gə jar** from Dû Chaocháin, contrasting *de aol* **gə iːl**, *de Éire* **gə eːr´ə**, *de aois* **gə iːʃ** from Faulmore, which nevertheless has *de fhear* **gə jar**. It is noteworthy that he cites no examples of glides following *de/do* before back vowels, *d'Eoin* **goːn´**, *d'Albain* **galəbin**, *d'eorna* **goːrnə**. In south Connacht, Ó Curnáin (2007: 1370) shows us that speakers in Iorras Aithneach generally tolerate the elision or the hiatus resulting from *de/do* + vowel, where he

[19]The impression gleaned from a survey of readily available examples is that the glide is not the preferred method to resolve VBV homorganic front vowel hiatus in Irish dialects that do not have a regularised *a dh'* stage, with toleration and glottal stops being more common. Examples from Canúint of toleration include *ní fhéadfadh*, *bhí íonú*, *a díona íontas*, *goidé a íosa siad*. Examples of glottal stops are *ba íontas mór é*, *ní iasc in ae chor é*, *má dh'fhaigheas tú iasacht*, *bia eile*, *coileach a únsaig cailín*. A pan-Gaelic examination of hiatus resolution in VBV contexts would be fascinating but is beyond the scope of this article. David Mandic's recent dissertation on hiatus in Scottish Gaelic has shown how 'glottalisation can occur in sandhi when a stressed monosyllable is followed by a clitic or by a word with non-initial stress'. Examples include *nigh e* **ɲĩ ʔa̱** and *gun gabh e* **g̊ɤ̈ŋ gaˈɛː** (Mandic 2021: 33).

[20]See also p. 146: 'Preceding **a** in the word *fhear*, *de* > **gə j** with all good speakers, and also with some in **gə jaLəx** *de eallach*, **gə jarəx** *de earrach*.'

collected **gˊæːr**, **gaːr** and **go ar** for *d'fhear*, as well as **gaˑtiː ogəs gə aːruːr** for *dh'fhataí agus dho arbhar*. The synchronic evidence from other dialects as well as with the ahistoricism of **do dh'fhear* show that the Dû Chaocháin glide following **gə** is the innovation, and a useful one at that as it helps maximise syntagmatic contrast in what is otherwise a hiatus or elided sequence across grammatical units.[21] Ó Máille reports in *Urlabhraidheacht* (1927: 101) that this *do/de dh'* pattern before vowels was regular among speakers in central and north Connacht, north Conamara and Mayo, and that speakers from Sligo often omitted the *de/do* entirely, as in *a leithéid seo dh'fhear* **ə lˊehədˊ ʃo jær**.

A similar development has occurred in parallel in Scottish Gaelic, where the simple preposition *do/de* prefixes a *dh'* to the following vowel, effectively regularising a hiatus filler if the following word is vowel initial (Lamb 2025: 165–6). Gaelic speakers and writers from Scotland may have begun regularising this feature as far back as the fifteenth century to some extent, as we find *dhanadar* (= *dh'fhanadar*) already in the hand of a certain Dubhghall Albanach mac mhic Cathail in a manuscript from 1467, National Library of Scotland Adv. MS 72.1.1, fol. 7vb.35 (Ó Baoill 1988: 128). The differentiation of Scottish Gaelic *do*^{L} to *a*^{L} in the purposive and locative sense *chaidh e a dh'Íle* 'he went to Islay' as opposed to *thug e leabhar do dh'Iain* 'he gave Ian a book' is discussed below.

Manx, again showing its conservatism in regard to the developments discussed in this article, does not grammaticalise a glide and instead tolerates the hiatus formed between the preposition *dy* and a vowel-initial stressed word (*dy eash* = *do aois* **də ˈʌːʃ**).[22]

I would also argue the same origin for the hiatus filling yod we hear in the Iorras, Conamara and Déise pronunciations *ba é* **bə jeː**, *ba í* **bə jiː**, *ba ea* **bə ja**, *ba iad* **bə jiəd** and *ba shin* **bə jinˊ**, which are often interpreted orthographically with the historic *-dh* ending of the past subjunctive forms of the copula, the assumption being that **j** is an outcome of **ɣ**. But final *-dh* regularly gives **ɣ** and then either **ø**, **β**, **χ** and **g** in the southern half, and **uː** in the northern half of Ireland. On the other hand, *badh ea* **bə vˊa** (Ó Curnáin 2007: 1184) represents a possible expected outcome of final *-dh*, as seen in the English transliteration of the placename *Achadh Fhearaigh* in Antrim, i.e. Aghavary.[23]

Another situation where a yod appears is in the conditional forms of *abair* following *ní* in the northern half of the island.[24] From Clare up, the past tense of *abair* is reanalysed as *d'úirt* and *níor úirt*. In Connacht, the conditional forms are analysed as *d'éarfadh* and *ní éarfadh*, which is more commonly pronounced *ní dh'éarfadh* **nˊiː jeːrhəx** / **nˊiː jeːrhuː**, and interpreted orthographically as *ní*

[21]In the Irish of east Ulster another kind of hiatus filler, *h*, developed following the possessive pronouns before vowels, e.g. *mo hathair* **mə hɑːrˊ** as noted by Wagner (*LASID* IV, 297).

[22]From the speech of Ned Maddrell on UOSH SA0002: available on https://corpus.gaelg.im/docs/UOSH-HOYFM-SA0002 (accessed January 2026).

[23]See www.logainm.ie/63036.aspx (June 2026). Another possible explanation of origin of the **vˊ** pronunciations in the past and conditional forms of the copula is that it may have spread synchronically from indirect relative forms such as *gurbh* and *nárbh*, e.g. *gurbh ea* > *babh ea*.

[24]Excluding of course the Ulster dialects that prefer the negative prefix *cha*^{N}, where we find the *th-* and *cha dt-* opposition.

dhéarfadh (Ó Curnáin 2007: 1799 et seq.; De Bhaldraithe 1953: 284; Mhac an Fhailigh 1980: 21).

In the west Munster dialect of Corca Dhuibhne the *dh'* stage is also regularised to back vowels, pronounced **ɣ**, and is expanding well beyond what could be argued to be an etymological remit inherited from historic *do* > *dho*. Recent generations of native speakers increasingly use it to replace historic *-r* (< *ro*) in preverbal *níor* and *nár*, so we find the progression *níor fhéach*[25] > *níor dh'fhéach* > *ní dh'fhéach* and *níor fhan*[26] > *níor dh'fhan* > *ní dh'fhan*, as well as optative *ná dh'fhana* and sometimes even following *go/gur*[27] as in *go dh'imigh* (Ó Sé 2000: 68 §118–19 and 332 *et seq.*). It is also replacing the fossilised eclipsis in the past habitual forms *ní bhfaigheann* > *ní dh'fhaigheann*, which can be heard on Canúint from Seán snr. Ó Cíobháin from An Ghráig (OD017734_CD0939_1c1, 22:22). Notably, it has also been regularised following *á*, i.e. the third singular masculine prepositional-possessive form used with verbal nouns (< EMIr *agá* and *dá*): *á dh'ithe* **ɑː ɣ´ihɪ** 'eating it' and *á dh'fhaire* **ɑː ɣar´ɪ** 'looking at it'. It is also found in the first and second person singular forms, e.g. *'om dh'ithe* **ɪm´ ɣ´ihɪ** 'eating me', *'om dh'fhaire* **əm ɣar´ɪ** 'looking at me', *id dh'iompú* **əd ɣuːmpuː** 'turning you' and *id dh'fhiafraí* **əd ɣ´iːərˈhiː** 'asking for you' (Ó Sé 2000: 174–5). It is not found in the simple prepositional possessive forms, so we can contrast *im aonar* **əm eːnər** 'by myself' with *'om dh'aidleáil* **əm ɣaˈd´lˈɑl´** 'addling/confusing me'. It is also regular following *má* before vowels, as in *má dh'fhaighim* **mɑː ɣaim´** (Ó Sé 2000: 456 §798), *má dh'itheann* and *má dh'ólann*.

In south-west Munster, which as we have seen is the most conservative Irish dialect in its treatment of *do*, we very rarely find an infinitive-making and preverbal particle *dh'*, whether relative or not. When it is found however, it is used with the verb *ithe* (Ua Súilleabháin 1994: 525)[28] as in *mo dhóthain a dh'ithe* (QQTRIN016188c1, 1:07),[29] spoken by Nell Uí Ríordáin from Cúil Aodha. To this we may Dónal Ó Murchú's use of glottal stop in *ionganna ínsint* (OD017722_CD0927_18c1, 20:32), a speaker from Uíbh Ráthach. Similarly, in Iorras Aithneach Ó Curnáin (2007: 492 n. 1 and 1544) reports a rare occurance of *a dh'insean* **ə jiːnʃən**, as well as a rare occurrence of *a dh'fháil* **ə ɣɑːl´**, but the norm is generally to elide, tolerate the hiatus or use a glottal stop. An example from Canúint of a glottal stop in fast speech can be heard in *bia a í* (< *ithe*) **b´iə ʔiː**, by Seán Ó Conaola from Na hAille in Cois Fharraige (QQTRIN016177: 11:32).

[25]For example, Peig Sayers *gur fhéach* (QAC000158Ac1, 7:52).

[26]For example, Cáit Feiritéar *nár fhan* (QQTRIN016187c1, 18:10).

[27]Although *go* is usually followed by eclipsis, e.g. *go bhfan* and *go n-imigh*.

[28]Seán Ua Súilleabháin has referred to me in personal correspondence that *dh'* is quite regular before *ith* in Múscraí, both as a preverbal particle and as an infinitivising *do*, so we very often find *is í a dh'ith é* 'it is she who ate it', and *ní féidir liom í a dh'ithe* 'I can't eat it (lit. her)'.

[29]In the same recording, the speaker tolerates the same hiatus in *is náir orm é insint* (QQTRIN016188c1, 14:08). Perhaps there is a very slight articulation of the *yod* here, that is so faint that other ears may hear it differently, which itself shows how the perception of the *yod* in its initial stages is so elusive and parallel to the problems described in Davidson and Erker (2014).

These examples suggest that the **j** glide is in a very early stage of being grammaticised and interpreted as *dh'*, starting from long front-vowel to high front-vowel sequences *é dh'insint* and *é dh'ithe*, but it has not yet been consistently applied to back vowels *é dh'fháil*.

A > *A DH'* BEFORE VOWELS

Relative *a dh'* is today regular in Scottish Gaelic,[30] Corca Dhuibhne and the Déise. It was also found in south Kilkenny,[31] east Cork, south Tipperary, north Kerry[32], perhaps west Limerick,[33] and also in west Clare, albeit sporadically (Ua Súilleabháin 1994: 526). It is of course tempting to think that this isogloss may have been found continuously from north Kerry through to south Tipperary, but this is difficult to ascertain today. Relative *a dh'* is based on the ***a*** / **ø** stage with a grammaticalisation of the glide vowel that can appear in the regular south-west Munster Irish outcome *is í ith é* and *is í iarr orm*. Similarly, infinitive *a dh'* is the regularisation of the glide vowel **j** that can appear in *cad a bhí sí ithe* and *an rud a bhí sí iarraidh*, and its rationalisation as *dh'*, so Irish speakers from the western part of Corca Dhuibhne say *cad a bhí sí a dh'ithe*.[34]

These **j** glides are grammaticised and understood natively as a lenited *dh'*, after which they are generalised to back vowels as well, *é a dh'ól* and *an deoch a dh'ól sé*. Whether the hiatus filler is **j** or **ɣ** generally depends on the phonological quality of the stressed vowel in each dialect, not on its historical onset. For example, in *a dh'iompó* **ə ˈɣuːmpoː** and *a dh'ionsaigh* **ə ˈɣuːnsɪg´** the onset is a back vowel in Corca Dhuibhne (Ó Sé 2000: 67–8), but in the Déise the onset is a front vowel **ə jaumpoː** and **ə jaunsɪg´**, according to the regular phonology of the diphthong **au** in word initial position (Breatnach 1947: 23 and 39). Similarly, in Scottish Gaelic the onset is a front vowel in *ionnsachadh* **iũːsəχəɣ** ('to learn'), so we find *a dh'ionnsaich* **ə jũːsix´** *dh'ionnsaighe* **jũːsiː** ('towards') (Borgstrøm 1940: 147–8).

In Corca Dhuibhne the preverbal and infinitive *dh'* stage may have only taken hold in the past two centuries or so, since recordings of speakers born in the late-nineteenth century have more examples of the *a* stage than are

[30]But not Manx.

[31]See Breathnach (1992: 30), e.g. 'mar a oilfear' **mɑr ə ɣilʹfər**.

[32]I'd like to thank Séamus Barra Ó Súilleabháin for bringing CBÉ MS 658 to my attention, which on pages 278–84 contains three stories in Irish transcribed in 1939 by Seosamh Ó Dálaigh from a cylinder recording of Séamas Ó Riada, a native speaker from the Ceann Chiarraí peninsula in the parish of Ballyheige. The transcriptions show that the speaker had a regularised *a dh'* stage in *nead a dh'fhág* (p. 282), *do dh'imig*, *seara dh'itheadar*, *seara dh'fhágfadh*, *nuair a dh'imi' sé* (p. 283) *agus dh'fhág*, *nuair a dh'imig* (p. 284). To these we can contrast east Kerry's Donnchadh Ó Cuilleanáin's *má éirig* and *nuair éirigh* (CBÉ MS 475, 258), a speaker from Ré Chaislí, near Brosna, also transcribed by Seosamh Ó Dálaigh in 1938: which shows no regularised *a dh'* stage, like Uíbh Ráthach and Cork. Both speakers were born in the 1860s.

[33]I know of only one example, in a CBÉ recording made of John Roche of Mountcollins in 1961 (CBÉ T0144), who in his rendition of the song *Bean Dubh an Ghleanna* says '*nuair a dh'fhéachainn féin anún*' **jaːχɪn´** (1:29).

[34]In the south-west Munster dialects of Cork these structures are avoided, and the periphrastic structure *cad a bhí aici á ithe* or *á ithe aici*, likewise *an rud a bhí aici á iarraidh*, or *an rud a bhí á iarraidh aici* is preferred (Ua Súilleabháin 1994: 525).

typically heard today. One example from Canúint is: *b'fhiú dhuit é fhiscint* **eː ˈiʃkˊɪnˊtˊ** from Muiris Kavanagh, a.k.a. Kruger (QQTRIN016178: 27:24). The same generation also have examples where the glide is regular but seemingly not fully rationalised as a *dh'*, so we regularly hear *á dh'fhuineadh* **ɑː jinˊɪ** (QQTRIN011960c3, 6:48) 'kneading it', with a slender yod glide, despite the word *fuineadh* having a broad **f** in the dialect, beside *á dh'fhuirseadh* **ɑː ɣirˊʃɪ** 'harrowing it', with a broad **ɣ**. Similarly, the verb *aontú* takes a broad **ɣ** in the Corca Dhuibhne dialect, e.g. *ní dh'aontaím* **nˊiː ɣeːnˈtiːmˊ** (Ó Sé 2000: 324 §595), but in Conamara, where the yod glide is not rationalised as *dh'* and where it only occurs as an optional and sporadic hiatus-resolution mechanism, we sometimes hear *ní aontóinn* **nˊiː ˈʲeːntoːNˊ** (OD016950_CD0135_6c1, 00:06).

We can date the earliest preverbal and infinitive *dh'* in Scotland to the first half of the sixteenth century, from the Book of the Dean of Lismore, which has a plethora of examples, spelled with *z*, showing the *dh'* stage, in both relative, e.g. *a zayg a zeyrris gi moch* (= *a gheug a dh'eireas gu moch*) (McLauchlan 1862: 78.18), and non-relative position: *di zagamir* (= *do dh'fhàgamair*) (McLauchlan 1862: 8.11). It also shows an infinitive glide in *gin skaili a zinsi* (= *gun sgeul a dh'innse*) (McLauchlan 1862: 36.6) where *sgeul* is clearly the object of the verbal noun. Interestingly, Scottish Gaelic no longer allows for *dh'* on a vowel-initial transitive verb when the object precedes it (Lamb 2025: 300–1), and the *dh'* of *zinsi* (= *dh'inse*) was omitted by Cameron in his 1892 transcription from the original manuscript (Cameron 1892: 60–1: 'gun sgeul do innseadh').[35] In Modern Scottish Gaelic *dh'* is prefixed to a vowel following *a* only when it is the subject of the verb that precedes it. So, theoretically at least, we find the minimal pairs:

chan eil cuimhne agam air a' bhò ithe 'I can't remember eating the cow'
chan eil cuimhne agam air a' bhò a dh'ithe 'I can't remember the cow eating'

However, as explained by Lamb (2025: 301), modern speakers prefer to use a finite complement or the *a bhith ag* construction to resolve the second scenario, so we would typically find *chan eil cuimhne agam gun robh a' bhò ag ithe* or *chan eil cuimhne agam air a' bhò a bhith ag ithe*. I am aware of one further example of an irregularly written yod glide where the object precedes the verbal noun in Modern Scottish Gaelic, i.e. *iadsan leis am miann oidhirp a thoirt air na dàin a dh'eadar-theangachadh*, 'those who wish to take it upon themselves to translate the poems', written by Calum Mac Phàrlain, the editor of *A Handful of Lays* (1923: ix), i.e. the transliteration and translation of *Lamh-sgribhainn Mhic Rath*.[36]

Infinitive A^L > *AG*

Once the Early Modern infinitive *do* structures are realisable with a^L **ə**, we see parallel efforts across several Gaelic dialects to reanalyse or avoid the particle

[35] But not by McLauchlan (1862: 36–7).
[36] I am grateful to Will Lamb for discussing these points with me.

in a number of constructions. Phonologically the sound **ə** is weak and exposed to elision before vowels and *f* which puts pressure on speakers to try and resolve potential syntagmatic ambiguity with periphrasis or by strengthening the particle through reanalysis.

Some Gaelic dialects have reanalysed this a^L with *ag* in sentences where the object of the verbal noun precedes the main-clause verb, i.e. *cad a bhí sí a ithe* > *cad a bhí sí ag ithe*. This reanalysis has become the standard in Scottish Gaelic where we now find *dè tha thu a' dèanamh* (*do dhéanamh* > *a dhéanamh* > *ag déanamh*) (Watson 1994: 695). Classical Manx (Lewin 2016: 173) shows both the leniting *do* and *a* stage (spelled both *dy* and *y*),[37] but Modern Manx appears to have undergone a similar reanalysis, i.e. *c'red ta shiu jannoo* **ʤanu:**[38] (= *céard tá sibh déanamh*), where the historic *do* is lost entirely (Lewin 2016: 172–80). Reanalysis of traditional a^L with *ag* was regular among the older speakers from Iorras Aithneach surveyed by Ó Curnáin in *iarraidh* and *fáil*, e.g. *céard a bhí tú ag iarraidh a chuir air* **kʼeːrd ə vʼiː tuː gʼiər ə xirʼ erʼ** and *céard a bhí mé ag fáil* **kʼeˑrd ə vʼiː mʼɛ fɑˑlʼ** (2007: 1547–8). Evidence from Irish of the northern half shows a tendency to retain a^L, for example Joe Mac a' Luain's *goidé a bhí sé a iarraí* (QAC000319Bc1, 4:10) and Peadar Mac Suibhne's *an rud a bhí sé a iarraí* (QQTRIN016195c1, 7:36). Pádraig Ua Maoileoin (1978: 94) noted his impression that reanalysis of a^L with *ag* was as a general tendency of Irish speakers from the northern part of the Corca Dhuibhne: ' "cad tá sé a dhéanamh?" i nDún Chaoin, ach "cad tá sé ag déanamh" go minic thuaidh." ' But Ó Sé reports some examples of *ag* for a^L from western Corca Dhuibhne as well (2000: 364–6).

Like the bardic grammarians before him Bergin's proscription of this innovation, 'a solecism unknown to the speech or literature' (Bergin 1930: xv), is a tell-tale sign that it was already in use in his time.[39] The first written example I know of is from 1836: in *cad do bhí mé a' déanadh*, albeit in a translation made by an Englishman who had probably learned Irish as an adult, Revd Dr Charles Gostling Townley (1781–1856), who served as minister for Limerick between 1816 and 1844. But another example from a native speaker appears in Muiris Paodhar's *Teagasc ar an Sean-Tìomna* printed in 1864: *ná raibh fhios aca cá raibh sé ná cad a bhí sé ag déanamh* (Ó Madagáin 1974: 334). On a phonological level, the innovation a^L > *ag* can be understood as another mechanism to improve the hiatus resolution across the word boundary *cad a bhí sí a dh'ithe* > *cad a bhí sí ag ithe*. Speakers must have also felt the analogical pressures of the regular present continuous structure *tá sé ag ithe* > *cad tá sé ag ithe*, as well as from temporal structures like *an fhaid a bhí sé ag ithe*.

Another construction where historical infinitive do^L > a^L is prone to reanalysis or periphrasis in Irish is that in which the subject or the agent of a

[37] For example *nee eh ad y hilgey reesht* (Job 20:15), which in EModIr orthography we could render *do-ní sé iad do theilgeadh a-rís*. Example from Lewin (2016: 182).

[38] https://corpus.gaelg.im/docs/YouTube-Skeealyn-Vannin-Disk-1-Track-9, accessed January 2026.

[39] In 1930 when Bergin printed this comment, the Dún Chaoin informants from whom Ó Sé collected *an rud a bhíonn an broc ag tóch* were children.

transitive verbal noun directly precedes it, i.e. when the doer of the action expressed by a verbal noun precedes it and the verbal noun can take a direct object. In his notes on *Desiderius*, O'Rahilly (1941: 263) explains that the agent is to be inferred by the context in these constructions in Early Modern Irish. When a verb is only intransitive, e.g. *teacht*, *imeacht*, *dul*, Modern Irish still supports these constructions, e.g. *is maith liom é a theacht*. But for transitive verbs, especially for those that can be both transitive and intransitive (i.e. ambitransitive), e.g. *ithe*, *ól*, *bogadh*, Modern Irish speakers today mostly avoid a^{L} with the verbal noun if the subject precedes it, and a^{L} is reserved for cases where the object precedes. In other words, *ní maith liom é a ithe* only means 'I don't like to eat it', not *'I don't like him to eat it'. There are three main solutions: 1) finite clauses: e.g. *cuir an bia i bhfolach ní maith liom é a ithe* > *ní maith liom go mbíonn sé ag ithe*; 2) use the infinitive *a bheith ag* construction, which ensures that the noun or pronoun that precedes the verbal noun it is perceived as the subject, *ní maith liom é a bheith ag ithe*; 3) replace a^{L} with *ag*, e.g. *ní maith liom é ag ithe*, which can also be *ní maith liom ag ithe é*.[40] This last solution requires some further comment as I am not aware of any description of it.

Since the Old Irish period the preposition *ag* (OIr *oc*) can be used with verbal nouns to create a present continuous or gerundive idiom *cách ro-t-chechladar oc precept* 'whoever shall hear thee teaching' (*Wb.* 28d16). When the subject of the main clause verb is the same subject of the verbal noun, excluding final clauses, Irish uses *ag*, e.g. *donaib hí robatar oc crochad christ*, 'to those who were crucifying Christ' (*Ml.* 86d19). On the other hand, as O'Rahilly explains in his notes on *Desiderius* (1941: 264), when the subject of the verbal noun is the object of the main clause verb, the structure is typically '*an fear do mholadh na mná*', i.e. 'for the man to be praising the woman'. O'Rahilly's invaluable notes on the *do* construction with the verbal noun omit the important detail that *ag* can also be used in these constructions: *do bhrígh go bhfaicim, gach lá dá ttig, an riaghuil ag dul síos a mórán d'ionaduibh* (O'Rahilly 1941: 209, ll. 6438–9). The difference in meaning is well juxtaposed when the main clause verb is one of perception, since we can either directly witness something in the moment that it is happening (*ag*) or we can perceive something to happen indirectly (*do*), i.e. perceive the fact that something is happening or that it has happened, maybe even from a secondary source. Keating illustrates these two usages in close succession in the following sentence:

> Iomthúsa sluagh Mumhan […] ar a chlos ar n-a mhárach dhóibh Sitric go n-a shluagh **do dhul** ré Ceallachán go Dún Dealgan

[40]These examples are my own, but they are based on syntax sometimes heard, albeit rarely, in everyday speech. I have documented the following examples from recordings: *is cuimhneach liom thú ag inseacht dom* (Bailiúchán Béaloidis Árann Sound Archive, 6100196); *ba bhreá leat iad a rith amu air a coínlig nú ag iúmpó sceaimhín ar chlais bán* (from Canúint: QQTRIN040946c1, 33:45); *is mór an cúlódar dhom é a siúl thríd an mbaile* (Doegen: LA_1117g1, 03:16); *nuair a tharneós mise ort an tua gan thú a cuir asad glaoi ná fead* (Doegen: LA_1133d1, 03:07).

> triallaid 'n-a dtóraidheacht, agus mar do mhothuigh Sitric iad **ag teacht** i ngar don bhaile … (Dinneen 1908b: 230)
>
> 'As regards the Munster host […] after they heard the next day about the fact that Sitric and his army had gone to Dundalk with Ceallachán they went after them, and when Sitric perceived them arriving close to town …'[41]

Since the above example uses two intransitive verbs, *dul* and *teacht*, the sense intended by Keating is still understood well today in Modern Irish, where it is still productive. But if we try to construct a minimal pair with an ambitransitive verb, e.g. *iompó*, using the two constructions, it is evident that the shade of meaning once conveyed by *do* is now obsolete.

*chuala mé an bád a iompó	*'I heard about the fact that the boat capsized'
chuala mé an bád ag iompó	'I heard the boat capsizing.'

The phonological development *do* > *a* in this case must have strained the syntactic distinction between this type of infinitival *do* structure and the gerundive *ag* structure. I would suggest that this in turn contributed to rise of the first and second periphrases discussed above, i.e. finite clauses and the *a bheith ag* structure, but also to reanalysis with *ag*. This entails that the sense conveyed by the infinitive structures become construed and interpreted as a gerundive structure. While the gerund in English has its own complexities and history, which have been well documented by De Smet (2012), the Modern Irish substitution of *ag* in some of the older infinitive *a* < *do* structures may have contributed as a substrate to syntax common in Irish English today: *bhfuil tú ag dul a dh'ithe* > *bhfuil tú ag dul ag ithe* > *are you going eating?* and *ní maith liom é a dh'ól fuiscí* > *ní maith liom é ag ól fuiscí* > *I don't like him drinking whiskey.* That certain infinitive *do* structures have been reanalysed with *ag* can be further demonstrated by the following type of sentence: *is breá liom é a theacht ach is breá liom é a' fágaint leis* 'I like it when he comes but I also like him leaving/when he leaves'. In this sentence the two verbal noun constructions are identical, *é* being the subject of both, but the first verb *teacht* is only intransitive whereas the second, *fágaint*, can be both transitive and intransitive. To avoid ambiguity, verbs that can be both transitive and intransitive use a^{L} when the object precedes them but increasingly use *ag* when the subject precedes them, e.g. *níor mhaith liom é a (dh')ithe* 'I wouldn't want to eat it', but *ceangail an gabhar san níor mhaith liom é ag ithe na bpósaíos orm* 'tie up that goat I don't want it eating my flowers.' A closer look at Keating suggests that the subtle distinction between *ag* and *do* in these constructions may have already been confused with ambitransitive verbal nouns in the seventeenth century. In the following two examples, *do* might improve the sense of the first and *ag* might be more appropriate for the second.

[41] Translation is my own, in order to elucidate the contrast in syntax.

Mar do chonnairc iomorro Cú Chorb Muimhnigh ag gabháil treise i Laighnibh. (Dinneen 1908b: 308)

'When Cú Chorb saw the Munstermen getting stronger in Leinster'.

Ód chonnairc iomorro Niúl Pharao go n-a shluagh do bháthadh. (Dinneen 1908a: 21)

'When Niúl saw that Pharo and his host had drowned'.[42]

Similarly, we find examples of *ag* being used where we might expect *do* in infinitive constructions from other seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors:

As gnáth Dia ag tabhairt furtachta do na riachtanasuibh.

Óir as gnáth an t-anam ag malartughadh an choirp. (Ó Conchúir 1972: 48 and 78)

'As truagh leam an cás beirte sin ort, a Oisín, agus gan mé féin ag tabhairt teagaisg duit.' (Ní Shéaghdha 1967: 72)

as leór leamsa mé féin ag rádh seanmóra isin ccathraigh si. (Ó Súilleabháin 1957: 59)

To which we might compare the more common and expected syntax from the period, subject + *do* + verbal noun + object structure, described by O'Rahilly:

is í mo thoil tusa do thabhairt chinn Eóin baisde dhamh anois. (Ó Domhnaill 1602: *Marcas* 6:25)

nách áil leis sinn do dhéanamh comhluadair. (O'Rahilly 1941: 144 l. 4849)

dob áil liom gan tusa do thabhairt achmhasáin damh. (O'Rahilly 1949: 62)

Ní leor leis sinn do dhéanamh maitheasa dár n-eascáirdibh. (Connradh Chuilm Naomhtha 1907: 99)

The confusion between the two structures must have been further compounded by the use of the possessive + prepositional forms *dá* and *agá*, which through lenition of *dá* > *dhá* and elision of the first vowel in *agá* > *gá*, must have collapsed the distinction between this Early Modern minimal pair:

chuala fear dá moladh	'I heard that a man was praising her'
chuala fear agá moladh	'I heard a man praising her'

[42]Translations are my own, in order to elucidate the contrast in syntax.

PURPOSIVE *DO*^{L} > *A*^{L} > *AG* AND LOCATIVE *DO*^{L} > *A*^{L}

Lastly, as was discussed by O'Rahilly (1932: 233), *ag* generally tends to replace *do*^{L} > *a*^{L} in purposive infinitive clauses in Irish dialects south of Ulster, e.g. *teacht do chaint leis* > *teacht a chaint leis* > *teacht ag caint leis*. Although this locative or purposive syntax has become unproductive in most modern Irish dialects, as O'Rahilly noted, it has everywhere been preserved in *a chodladh* and *abhaile*.[43] It is useful to distinguish here between the purposive use of *do* before verbal nouns, e.g. Scottish Gaelic *chaidh e a shuidhe* 'he went in order to sit down' or Donegal *chuaigh mé a chaint leis*, and the locative use before nouns, especially placenames, as in Scottish Gaelic *dol a Ghlaschù* and Irish *dul abhaile*.[44]

Both Irish and Scottish Gaelic (Lamb 2025: 165–75) regularly reduce *do*^{L} to *a*^{L} **ə** in the purposive sense, e.g. *chaidh e a shuidhe* 'he went in order sit down' and *dul a chodladh*, but retain *do* **də** when the sense is 'giving to someone', e.g. *thug e leabhar do dh'Iain* 'he gave Ian a book' and *thug sé leabhar d'Eoin*.[45] One exception is Munster[46] *a d'iarraidh* **ɪ ˈdʹiːərɪgʹ** or **ɪ ˈdʹiːərə**, which has retained a fossilised purposive *d'* in its 'unweakened' form, but on a phonological level only that nevertheless prefixes **ə** (*a'* < *ag*) to it through analogy with the expected present continuous construction, *d'iarraidh* > *a' d'iarraidh* . It is used interchangeably with *ag iarraidh* and conveys the meanings of both the present continuous 'trying to' and the purposive 'in order to seek', as can be demonstrated by two examples in close succession from a recording of Peig Sayers on Canúint: *táim a d'iarraidh an ocrais a bhuint díom féin* and *é ina ndiaidh a d'iarraidh ná ligfeadh sé aon cheann dos na giorraithe thar chlaí* (QAC000158Ac1, 10:10 and 9:22). But aside from this fossilised survival, purposive *do*^{L} is reduced to *a*^{L} where the syntax has remained productive, i.e. Scottish Gaelic and Ulster dialects, where it regularly prefixes *dh'* to a vowel-initial verbal noun. Remarkably, in Ulster this *dh'* is prefixed in purposive infinitives only, not in simple infinitives. The two systems can be heard in close succession on a recording from Dom Mag Fhloinn from An Ghaeltacht Láir, *go mbeadh sé ábalta tionsclóir a fháil le teacht agus a ghol a dh'obair insa mhonarclain sin* (OD018569_CD1786_nuig1786_10, 3:01). Some more examples of the purposive infinitive in Ulster are *d'imigh sé a sheilg* and *rachadh sé a dh'iarraí mrá*, pronounced **rahatʹ ʃə ˈjiːəriː mraː** (QAC000317Ac1, 6:12 and 9:17) by Anna Nic an Luain from Na Cruacha and *tá siad ag imeacht a dh'obair* **ə ˈɣobɪrʹ**, from Joe Bheag Mac an Luain (OD018582_CD1799_nuig1799_10, 11:38) and *chua mé a*

[43] Although in Ulster we usually hear *na bhaile* < *chun an bhaile*.

[44] For Old and Middle Irish examples of these two uses see *DIL* s.v. *do* A ii 'with follg. vn. in phrases expressing purpose' and A i 'introducing *terminus ad quem*' respectively.

[45] Manx on the other hand seems to have been an outlier in preserving the initial *d* of the purposive *do* (*dy*) into the twentieth century.

[46] Regarding the northern boundaries of *a d'iarraidh*, I am aware of a north-west Clare example from Seán Ó Briain from Sráid na nIascairí that can be heard on Canúint: *dúirt muid go raghamuis go Conamara a d'iarra braon poitín* (QQTRIN040946c1, 34:43). Ó Curnáin (2007: 1542 and 1548) reports examples of *d'iarra* to the east of Iorras Aithneach as well, specifically An Cheathrú Rua. De Bhaldraithe (1953: 11) also reports the example *a d'iarra seagal* from Cois Fharraige.

dh'obair, from Peadar Mac Suibhne of Árainn Mhóir (QQTRIN016195c1; 2:15). As noted by O'Rahilly (1932: 233 n. 2), the verb *tosaigh* regularly triggers the purposive a^L in Ulster, e.g. *thosa siad a dheanú* (QQTRIN016152: 14:38), *thoise sí a dh'inse dó* (QAC000317Ac1, 8:39). There are also examples without the prefixed *dh'*, *a gol a oibriú* (OD018765_CD1983_nuig1983_19, 15:30), spoken by Seán Ó hEochaidh. North Connacht Irish generally has *ag* instead of a^L in the purposive, e.g. *thoise mé a déanú* (QQTRIN023372c1, 4:45), but the older syntax is sometimes preserved with *cónaí* in the sense 'going to live', e.g. *chuaigh sé a chónaí go Cathair na Mart*,[47] from Inis Gé islander Mícheál Mac an tSaoir and, *cuireadh fear as an Aird isteach a chónaí ann*, from Seán Ó Clochartaigh from An Aird Mhóir in Iorras Aithneach (OD017119_CD0309_1c1, 15:15).

The purposive a^L was also inherited by the regular double verbal noun constructions *ag goil* a^L/*ag dol* a^L, which are used from south Galway to Scotland (O'Rahilly 1932: 234). But in areas where the purposive syntax is no longer productive, i.e. outside of Ulster and Scotland, this structure has been hypercorrected to *ag goil ag*, which is now the regular pattern in Conamara (Ó Curnáin 2007: 1546 *et seq.*).[48] Some examples include: *níl mise ag goil ag tóigeáil* (OD018362_CD1573_nuig1573_05c1, 2:46), from Tomás Ó Máirtín from Cinn Mhara in south Galway; *tá mise ag goil ag ínseach scéil* (QQTRIN039961c1, 12:35) from Colm Ó Caoidheáin and *bhí bean (…) a bhí ag goil ag fáil* (OD018362_CD1573_nuig1573_05c1, 14:09) from Máire an Ghabha Uí Cheannabháin (both from Iorras Aithneach), *ar an toirt a bhfaca mé an rón ag goil ag iascaireacht taobh an churaigh* (QQTRIN016152: 2:32) from Riocard Breathnach from Inis Gé. To these we might compare *bhí sé a gol a thóirt* from Na Cruacha's Joe Bheag Mac an Luain (QAC000319Bc1, 3:29), *nach bhfuil tú a goil a phósú* from Tyrone's Jane Nic Ruairí's (QQTRIN028506c1, 10:58). But even in these regions the historical purposive a^L is prone to reanalysis with *ag*, e.g. *thiocfadh le daoiní dul amach ag coimhead*, from Caitlín Nic Giolla Bhríde in Gaoth Dobhair (QQTRIN016153, 5:05).

The picture that emerges from the modern dialect evidence is that the purposive *do* split phonologically from the rest of the preposition and was regularly reduced to a^L before verbal nouns, a formation which Munster and Connacht dialects reanalysed as *ag*. Munster *d'iarraidh* may have been fossilised and conflated with the regular present continuous *ag iarraidh* before the purposive a^L split phonologically from the rest of the preposition and was used hypercorrectly as the syntax became less productive in that region. The purposive syntax appears to have been best preserved in the northern Gaelic speaking regions, gradually becoming less productive as we move southward in Ireland.

In the locative use before nouns, especially place-names, do^L appears to have also been reduced to a^L, both in Scottish Gaelic and in Irish dialects, e.g. *chaidh e a dh'Ìle* and *chuaigh sé abhaile*. However, modern Irish dialects no

[47] https://www.rte.ie/radio/rnag/clips/21297294/ 54:40 (accessed 11 September 2026).

[48] This change is also happening amongst younger speakers in Scotland as well, e.g. *tha mi a' dol a' dèanamh an obair*. I am grateful to Will Lamb for providing me with this example. He also noted that Gàdhlig has *chaidh mi ga dhèanamh* and not *dha dhèanamh*.

longer use this locative a^L productively and appear to have replaced it, mostly with *go*[49] or perhaps by fossilising it in prepositional phrases, e.g. *chuaigh sé a fhad leis*.[50] A possible descendent of this weakened locative a^L preposition may however survive in the preposition + article formation **ən**, often spelled *'on*, as in Corca Dhuibhne *dul 'on Daingean*, south-west Clare *isteach 'on chalaithe* **ʃtax ə ˈxaləhə** collected by Holmer[51] (1965: 164), or Donegal *goil 'on Oilean* (OD018765_CD1983_nuig1983_19, 0:55) and *ar an bhealach 'on Charraic* (QQTRIN016152: 12:37), both by Seán Ó hEochaidh.[52] It is used with place-names that take the article and does not take the genitive, so it is not derived from *dochum* > *chun* > *'un*. In Corca Dhuibhne, where this locative preposition is most productive today, $'on^L$ has a distinct mutation pattern from don^N or $dhon^N$ and is not interchangeable with it, so much so that we may form a minimal pair: *cé a thug 'on tsagart é?* 'who brought him to the priest?' and *cé a thug don sagart é?* 'who gave it to the priest?'.

It must also be added that the simple preposition *do* can be reduced to *a* in its partitive sense inherited from the semantic conflation with *de*. This *a* is then sometimes elided and omitted entirely in Munster dialects, usually following a vowel, e.g. *an taobh so Dhaingean* (OD017734_CD0939_1c1, 20:49); *an taobh so thír* (QQTRIN016192c1, 12:57), but also following a **r** in *trí nó ceathair cheannaibh* (QQTRIN040946c1, 3:03). Before a vowel however, the norm is to retain *dh*: *san am so dh'oíche* **ɣiːhɪ** (OD017722_CD0927_18c1; 5:01). Another example of the spread of *a* from historic *do* (< *de*) can also be found in the expression *a chlog* 'o'clock' when telling the time. Perhaps numbers ending in dentals, i.e. *seacht* and *ocht* assisted the spread of the *a* form in these expressions, e.g. *seacht do chlog* > *seacht a chlog* and *ocht do chlog* > *ocht a chlog*, therefore giving rise to *trí a chlog* and *naoi a chlog*. This development is parallel to that which appears to have taken place after *teacht* and *imeacht* in the purposive and locative use.

[49]In Scottish Gaelic the subtle distinction between the locative prepositions *gu* and *do* is maintained, as explained by Lamb: 'both *gu* and *do* can mean 'to', but *do* typically conveys passing a boundary point, while *gu* conveys stopping at it (…) e.g. *a' dol do Pheairt* and *a' dol gu Peairt*.' (Lamb 2025: 176). The 'stopping at it' sense of *go* is preserved in the Irish expression *bliain gus an lá inniu* 'a year up until today', in which an inherited EMIr *gusan* 'to the' has been reanalysed as *agus an* 'and the'.

[50]Another interpretation of this construction is that the *a* is the third singular masculine possessive, 'he went its length by him'.

[51]Holmer spells this *isteach do chalaithe*. I have amended this, the phrase is identical to the current one in Corca Dhuibhne *isteach 'on chala* or *'on chalaithe*, the **n** of the article formation *'on* often being elided in speech. The noun *caladh* was pronounced *calaithe* in the nominative singular in the Irish of south-west Clare. See *LASID* II, pt. 22, n. 1064 **kɑlɪhĕ**. Both *cala* and *calaithe* are current nominative singular pronunciations in Corca Dhuibhne (OD017800_CD1007_nuig1007_05, 16:51).

[52]We should also consider Mac Clúin's examples *chuaidh sé dhon bhaile mór* and *chuaidh sé don bhaile mór* (1940: xxxiv). Seán Ó Flannagáin reports an example *raghad do'n nGort* from the parish of Beagh on the south Galway and east Clare border area (see CBÉ MS 707 p. 280), but also has *an blas Connachtach athá ag muinntear Loch a' Tóraic ar fad go dteighe tú dho'n Ghráig* (p. 340). Ó Flannagáin regularly has don^L in the other sense, e.g. *san aimsir chaite do'n bhriathar* (p. 282). From west Limerick, Liam Ó Danachair (1947: 67) reports *nuair a rachaim-se 'on Tóin Bhán*.

It is not entirely obvious why the purposive or locative use of the preposition should split phonologically from the rest of the preposition, but perhaps the following environments increased instances of reanalysis enough to trigger the birth of *a* **ə** and *'on* **ən**: 1) the fusion of the initial *d* of *do* with the dental ending of the verbal nouns *teacht*, *imeacht* and *tabhairt*, in the 'bringing' sense, resulting in metanalysis to *a* and *'on*; 2) the typical[53] loss of an unstressed **ɣ** following **r** in the combinations *siar dhon* and *soir dhon*, e.g. Colm Ó Caoidheáin's *chuaigh sé siar 'on áit* (QQTRIN039961c1, 14:18), exemplified in surnames such as *Ó Ciardhubháin* **kiːərəvɑːn´** (anglicised *Kerwan*) and *Ó Fearghasa* anglicised Ferris as in *Baile Uí Fhearghasa*, i.e. Ballyfaris in Sligo, and other placenames such as *Paróiste Mórdhach* **muːrəχ** in Corca Dhuibhne; 3) the regular loss of unstressed **ɣ** following the stressed final **χ** in locative phrases such as *isteach dhon* and *amach dhon*, exemplified word-internally in the placenames *Baile Uí Eachach* (< *Eachdhach*), *Eachroim* (< *Eachdhroim*) and *Ráth Eachainn* (< *Eachdhonn*). A combination of these factors may have favoured the reduction of *do* to *a* and of *don* to *'on* in locative or purposive use enough to split it from the rest of the preposition, which remained *do/dho* and *don/dhon* in the pure dative sense of 'giving to'. Although the preposition + article formation *'on* is now mostly associated with the Irish of Corca Dhuibhne, the common exclamation *h'anam 'on diabhal*[54] is widespread in Munster even where *'on* is not productive, e.g. Cúil Aodha's Nell Uí Ríordáin *h'anam 'on dial* (QQTRIN016188c1, 10:12) and Rinn Ó gCuanach's Déaglán Ó Muiríosa *t'anam 'on dial* (QQTRIN016189c1, 6:37). I am not aware of evidence from Connacht dialects that shows that *'on* ever split from *don*, instead *'on*^{L} and *gon*^{L} can alternate in the equivalent expression, as heard in close succession by the same speaker Tomás Ó Beirn from Port an Chlóidh, *h'anam 'on deabhal* and *d'anam gon deabhal* (Dúchas.ie, T0047.9, 2:06 and 2:57),[55] or Iorras Aithneach's Beairtle Ó Conghaile *thug a mháthair (...) gon diún is gon deabhal é* (QQTRIN039961c1, 21:35); also *chua muid héin agus scata eile go bhuachaillí na háite gon Teach Dóite* (Doegen recording, LA_1175g1, 1:50).

Paradoxically, Scottish Gaelic, which as we have seen regularly reduces *do (dh')* to *a (dh')* in the locative sense, e.g. *chaidh e a dh'Íle*, regularly has *dhan* when the preposition is combined with the article, so we find *chaidh e dhan eilean*. However, some examples of *dhan*^{L} > *an*^{L} are attested, e.g. *ruith an cu 's chaidh e an chathair*[56] and *dol an chladach*.[57] The Scottish Gaelic word *dachaigh* 'home', which is semantically parallel to Irish *abhaile*, adds further complication since it appears to have been formed through univerbation of a lenited locative *do*^{L} with the word *taigh* 'house', presumably before the preposition was regularised to *a*^{L} in these contexts, after which the stress

[53]Notable exceptions are Donegal *doraga* < *dorugha* < ON *dorg*, meaning 'fishing line', which developed to *dorú* elsewhere (*LASID* I, 275), Donegal *cargas* < *carghas* 'lent' as well as McGarrigle < Mac Fhearghail. I would like to thank the editor of this article for pointing these out to me.

[54]Another variant is *bheirim 'on dial* (Seán Criomhthainn, QQTRIN016203c1, 10:04).

[55]I am indebted to Liam Mac Congáil for pointing out these examples to me.

[56]https://dasg.ac.uk/CQPweb/dasg/context.php?batch=32&qname=i4drnrt24eq.

[57]https://dasg.ac.uk/CQPweb/dasg/context.php?batch=1&qname=i4e5p27e0ga.

was retracted to the first syllable of the new word through analogy with the regular stress pattern in Scottish Gaeilic, *a' dol dha thaigh* > *a' dol dhachaigh* **dɔl ˈɣaχi** (Borgstrøm 1948: 48). Perhaps the parallel Irish semantic development, i.e. *abhaile*, univerbated after the weakening of *do* > *a* and has been able to maintain stress on the second syllable through analogy with words like *arís*, *anois*, *aréir*, *anocht*, *inniu*, *anseo*, *ansin* etc.

RELATIVE *A D'* IN THE NORTHERN HALF

In Standard Modern Irish the leniting particle *a* (< *do*) is regular in relative constructions. Before past, imperfect and conditional forms, a lenition-resisting *d'* is reborrowed from the non-relative forms and prefixed to vowel- or *f*-initial verbs, so we find *an fear a d'ith* and *an bhean a d'fhág*. Broadly speaking, this reflects the usage in the spoken dialects of the northern half of Ireland. In the dialects of Clare and south Galway, we also often find the *a d'* sequence in the present and future tenses. One example from Canúint from Clare is *cad a d'airíonn tu* **kad ə darˊiːn tə** (QQTRIN040946c1, 6:40) by Anraí de Bláca, and some examples reported by Ó Curnáin (2007: 1487 et seq.) from Iorras Aithneach include *an duine deireannach a d'fhananns*, *cén fear a d'iocanns*, *cén uair a d'fhuadós*, *cé d'éalós*. For speakers that have this feature regularly, we may posit that it is the *a d'* sequence that is analysed as the relative marker before vowels and *f*, not just leniting *a*. This is a parallel development to the *a dh'* sequence that is the regular relative marker before vowels and *f* in Corca Dhuibhne, Déise and Scottish Gaelic, irrespective of tense, e.g. *nuair a dh'imeoidh mé* and *nuair a dh'fhalbhas mi*. Therefore, when inherited relative do^{L} > a^{L} was followed by a vowel, the Connacht and Ulster solution to the hiatus has been to reborrow *d'* from the past, imperfect and conditional non-relative forms, whereas the Scottish Gaelic, Déise and Corca Dhuibhne development has been to regularise the slender yod glide, rationalise it as *dh'* and then have it spread to back vowels. The development may be summarised in the following table:

Early Modern Irish	1. *Cad/créd d'ith sé nuair d'ith sé?* 2. *Cad/créd do bhuail sé nuair do bhuail sé é?*
Cork (and Manx)	1. *Cad ith sé nuair ith sé?* 2. *Cad a bhuail sé nuair a bhuail sé é?*

Scottish Gaelic	**Corca Dhuibhne and Déise**	**northern half**
1. *Dè a dh'ith e nuair a dh'ith e?*	1. *Cad a dh'ith sé nuair a dh'ith sé?*	1. *Céard ith sé nuair a d'ith sé?*
2. *Dè a bhuail e nuair a bhuail e e?*	2. *Cad a bhuail sé nuair a bhuail sé é?*	2. *Céard a bhuail sé nuair a bhuail sé é?*

Dialects that today have the *dh'* stage may have once had a stronger proclivity to retain a non-elided *do*, as can be still found in south-west Munster today,

e.g. *do ith* and *do fhág*, and as was marked as the correct form by the bardic grammarians '*'do íarr', 'do fhíafraigh' cóir, 'd'iarr', 'd'fhiafraigh' lochtach ar-áon*' (IGT §73; Mac Cárthaigh 2014: 98). These dialects then began regularising and morphologising the yod vowel **j** that could occasionally be used to resolve the hiatus sequence, i.e. *do ith* > *do dh'ith* and *do iarr* > *do dh'iarr*, rationalising it as a slender reduplicated and lenited *d* and therefore expanding it to the corresponding back vowel environments as **ɣ**, giving us *do dh'fhág* and *do dh'fhan*. Once these forms became established in these dialects, *dh'* was felt as a sufficiently distinct marker of the past/conditional/imperfect tenses, and the original *do* became increasingly omitted or reserved for higher registers, leaving us with only *dh'* as the usual spoken form before vowels. This seems to be the situation in Corca Dhuibhne, the Déise and Scottish Gaelic. Ó Sé remarks how *do (dh')* can be retained in the dialect of Corca Dhuibhne (2000: 323 §594), particularly in storytelling or to reinforce the affirmation of a phrase. Perhaps an echo of Scottish Gaelic's historic attachment to non-elided *do* is preserved in the still obligatory non-elided *do* fossilised in the conjunct forms, e.g. *cha do dh'fhalbh e* and *an do dh'innis e?* Conversely, as we have mentioned previously, the south-west Munster dialects that have best preserved the original phonology and prosodic rhythm of *do* structures have so far mostly resisted the yod development, although they may show early stages of it in infinitive examples like *a dh'ithe*.

On the other hand, Clare, Connacht and Ulster dialects may have once had a stronger proclivity to elide *do* before vowels, preferring *d'ith* and *d'fhág* in non-relative position. This greater proclivity to elide *do* before vowels may have been the catalyst for the reanalysis of *dubhairt* and *ní dubhairt* as *d'ubhairt* and *níor ubhairt* which we also find in these regions, as well as *d'uaidh* and *níor uaidh* (< *duaidh*) for Clare at least (Holmer 1962: 154).[58] In relative position, once *do* > *a* became established as an independent relative particle irrespective of the tense that followed, non-relative *do* before consonants would have felt pressure to be discarded, since the inherited relative sequence was *an bhean a bhain* not **an bhean a do bhain*, leaving *bhain* alone to be understood as the past-tense form. But before vowels the elided *d'* was reborrowed from the non-relative forms in order to resolve hiatus, and even expanded beyond the past/conditional/imperfect tenses in some cases, *an bhean a d'ith* > *an bhean a d'itheann*, particularly in Clare and south Galway.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the 'weakening' of the preposition *do* to *a* in Early Modern Irish and argued that Gaelic dialects that have a regular *dh'* do not in fact preserve a relic of a lenited *do* stage but instead show an innovation and a grammaticalisation of the linking yod glide that can be perceived when inherited *do* > *a* precedes a high front vowel. It has argued that the main trigger

[58] But compare Kilkenny *dhuaidh mé* **ɣuə m´e**; *ní dhuaidh mé* **n´iː ɣuə m´e** (Breathnach 1992: 28).

for the weakening of *do* to *a* is its fusion with the initial *d* of words ending in *d* or *t*. In this, it has an interesting parallel with the univerbation found in English *gotta*, *wanna* and *gonna*, where the cognate preposition to our Irish *do* (i.e. *to*), which in English is also used to form the infinitive, can be condensed into the preceding word in some dialects (Lorenz 2013). Having established itself as a useful sandhi phenomenon between front vowels, this 'linking yod' is subsequently backformed to the velar fricative **ɣ**, in accordance with the regular palatal and velar contrast, to resolve the same hiatus issues between back vowels. Indicative of this is that in the dialects of south-west Munster, which best preserve the historical phonology and prosody of *do*, have a regular *dh'* only with the verb *ithe*. Another indication of this is that in dialects that do have a regular *dh'* stage the quality of the glide tends to align not with the historical onset of the stressed vowel but with its modern articulation in those particular dialects, as demonstrated by the contrast between Corca Dhuibhne *a dh'iompó* **ə ˈɣuːmpoː** and Déise **ə ˈjaumpoː**. The orthographic rationalisation of the yod glide as *dh'* is an example of how historical etymology has been used to interpret a phonological innovation in the philological history of Irish. The birth of *cad* and the spread of independent pronouns may have been the catalysts for the 'fall of *do*', which in turn caused the various Gaelic dialects to search for new strategies to try and rebuild phonologically clearer word boundaries where they were becoming obscured by the weak *a*. This was done by 1) morphologising the linking yod glide and rationalising it as *dh'*; 2) reborrowing *d'* from non-relative past and conditional paradigms into the relative, *an rud do fhág* > *an rud a fhág* > *an rud a d'fhág*; 3) substituting *ag* in certain infinitive environments, especially with ambitransitive verbs, which causes the original infinitive syntax to be reinterpreted as gerundive syntax. These are parallel repairs to the same inherited problem caused by a 'weakened' *a* particle at fundamental prosodic junctures.

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Andrea Palandri

Dublin City University