



## "Aspect" in Irish and Hiberno-English

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### Pour citer cet article

O'Kelly Dairine, « "Aspect" in Irish and Hiberno-English », *Cycnos*, vol. 15, n° spécial (Actes de l'atelier de linguistique), 1998, mis en ligne en 2021.

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### *Cycnos, études anglophones*

*revue électronique éditée sur épi-Revel à Nice*

ISSN 1765-3118      ISSN papier 0992-1893

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# EPI-REVEL

Revue électronique de l'Université Côte d'Azur

# “Aspect” in Irish and in Hiberno-English

Dairine O'KELLY\*

## I. Some characteristics of Hiberno-English

Unlike modern Romance and Germanic languages, Irish has no verb “have” and so has not the means to construct the parallel set of tenses that express the aspectual contrast which opposes simple and compound forms. To put it semantically, Irish is not in a position to establish relations of anteriority between two processes of the type illustrated in the following examples proposed by Benveniste:

[1] Quand il a écrit une lettre, il l'envoie .

[1]' Quand il avait écrit une lettre, il l'envoyait.

Benveniste commenting on this phenomenon says:

Dans notre vue, l'antériorité se détermine toujours et seulement par rapport au temps simple corrélatif. Elle crée un rapport logique intra-linguistique, elle ne reflète pas un rapport chronologique qui serait posé dans la réalité objective. Car l'antériorité maintient le procès dans le même temps qui est exprimé par la forme corrélative simple.

(Benveniste 1966, p. 247)

The subject of this paper concerns the expression — or non-expression — of these relations of anteriority in a special brand of English, known by those who specialize in it, as *Hiberno-English*<sup>1</sup>. This refers, of course, to English which has imported directly certain features of the Irish language and is spoken throughout most of the country, even by those who have only a smattering of their national language. The various ways of expressing what would, in standard English, be the present perfect is one of the picturesque features of this special brand of English that strikes the

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<sup>1</sup> It is quite misleading to call this variety of English Anglo-Irish, which logically should mean the Irish spoken by those whose mother tongue is English and has therefore imported features of this language.

foreign visitor to Ireland. Even the educated Irish will sometimes choose "Were you there ?" (translated directly from *an raibh tu ann ?*) to the standard English "Have you been there ?", and the construction "be + after + present participle" is frequently used to replace the standard English "have + past participle": "*Are you after seeing her ? / Have you just seen her ?*". These examples indicate that the double anteriority expressed by the *past perfect* must pose a separate and interesting problem. In the preface to his collection of folktales *Beside the Fire* (1910), Douglas Hyde, when discussing the various problems posed when translating Irish into Hiberno-English, makes the following remark with respect to this question :

I have scarcely used the pluperfect at all. No such tense exists in Irish, and the people who speak English do not seem to feel the want of it, and make no hesitation in saying, "I'd speak sooner if I knew that," when they mean, "If I had known I would have spoken sooner."

In this review of the problem, I have chosen, for practical purposes, to take my examples, not from Anglo-Irish literature, but from a bi-lingual version of one of the traditional Irish folk stories to be found in *By the Fireside*, noted down and translated by Douglas Hyde himself. The advantages of this choice are obvious, first ; it assures access to the original source in Irish, and secondly Douglas Hyde translated these stories, not into standard English, but into the variety of English spoken by the country people in Ireland at the turn of the century. Lastly, this variety of Hiberno-English, although slightly antiquated, has the advantage of being of special interest to readers of Anglo-Irish poetry, as Douglas Hyde's translations of traditional Irish love poetry (*Love Songs of Connacht*) were used extensively by William Butler Yeats, who had incidentally no direct knowledge of the Irish language himself.

With a view to providing a coherent understandable context, I have selected all my examples from a single story, "Mac ri Eireann" (the King of Ireland's Son). This Irish version of an ancient Indo-European theme — the Czech version is called "George and the Goat", tells of the adventures of a young man who takes a binding oath or *geasa* not to rest until he wins the hand of a young woman with *hair as black* as the raven he has just killed, *skin as white* as the snow on the ground and *cheeks as red* as the raven's blood spilt on the snow. The series of episodes that go to make up the story follow the conventions of the traditional folktale: an initial trial episode is followed by three encounters with superhuman monsters, resulting in the acquisition of magic weapons (shoes, cap and sword), and final encounter with the blood-thirsty "fair lady". Of additional interest is the fact that this story is the main source for both Spencer's *Fairy Queen* and Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*. A summary of the main events and characters is given in the appendix. Before examining the relevant examples, there follows a brief survey of the general structure of the Irish language.

SURVEY OF THE STRUCTURE OF IRISH

Irish, unlike modern European languages, has retained the original Indo-European ordering. This means that in copulative constructions the predicate precedes the subject. The following example — the answer given to the giant by the small green man (the green knight ?) — has been chosen for its extreme simplicity<sup>2</sup>:

The giant came out, and he said, "I feel the smell of a melodious lying Irishman under the sod of my country." "No melodious lying Irishman am I, says the short green man. (Hyde, 1910, p. 31)

[1]	NI	EIREANNACH	BINN	BREAGACH	MISE.
	<i>negation</i>	<i>noun</i>	<i>adjective</i>	<i>adjective</i>	<i>dem. pronoun</i>
	<i>not</i>	<i>Irishman</i>	<i>sweet(tongued)</i>	<i>lying</i>	<i>myself</i>
		PREDICATE			SUBJECT

Copula	Complement		Nominal component
	noun	adjective	pronoun
NI	EIREANNACH	BINN BREAGACH	MISE
<i>not</i>	<i>Irishman</i>	<i>sweet lying</i>	<i>I</i>

In the case of the noun, five cases have survived from the ancient system: nominative, accusative, dative, genitive and vocative. When it comes sentences constructed with verbs other than the copula, the order is V—S—C. The following extract tells of the first encounter during which the generosity of the hero is tested — despite his meagre means he hands over a quarter of the money he has got to pay the debts of a dead man. The example, also chosen for its simplicity, features a transitive verb, a direct object and an adjunct.

When the king of Ireland's son saw the sons and daughters of the dead crying and they without money to give the man he said to himself: "It's a great pity that these poor people have not the money," and he put his hand in his pocket and paid the five pounds himself for the corpse. (Hyde, 1910, p. 21)

[2] [AGUS]	CHUIR	SÉ	A	LAMH	ANN	A	PHOCA.
	<i>conj.</i>	<i>verb/past</i>	<i>pers.p.</i>	<i>poss.art;</i>	<i>noun</i>	<i>prep</i>	<i>poss.art. noun</i>
	<i>and</i>	<i>put</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>his</i>	<i>hand</i>	<i>in</i>	<i>his pocket</i>
	<i>Verb</i>	<i>Sujet</i>	<i>Complément</i>		<i>Indirect object</i>		
		<i>(nominative)</i>	<i>(accusative)</i>		<i>(dative)</i>		

CHUIR (past)	SÉ (pronoun)	A (det) LAMH (nom)	ANN (prep) A (det) PHOCA (nom)
<i>put</i>	<i>he</i>	<i>his hand</i>	<i>in his pocket</i>

<sup>2</sup> The abbreviations of the grammatical identification of the Irish words that will be used throughout this paper are to be understood as follows : *p. pron.* = personal pronoun, *dem. pron.* = demonstrative pronoun (this system corresponds to the French "celui-ci/celui-là", but is translated by "herself", "himself" etc.), *poss. art* = possessive pronoun or adjective, *prep.* = preposition, *conj.* = conjunction, *nom.* = nominative, *gen.* = genitive, *voc.* = vocative, *v. n.*, *verb. noun.* = verbal noun, *v.a. verb. adj.* = verbal adjective), *int. part.* = interrogative particle, *art.* = article. Where there is room the terms will be written in full.

There is neither an infinitive mood nor a present participle, both functions being discharged by the *verbal noun*. There is however a *verbal adjective* or *past participle*. The nominal nature of these forms is demonstrated by the fact that they are declined like nouns and adjectives. Like in French, there is a subjunctive mood with a “past-present” contrast, and in the indicative mood, five tenses. The conjugation table of CUR in the indicative mood (below) illustrates the similarity between Celtic and Romance languages. Superficially, Irish has a similar temporal architecture to French: a simple past is opposed to an habitual or “consuetudinal” past<sup>3</sup>, with the same morphological connection between the consuetudinal past and the conditional. The future and the conditional share the same thematic consonant [f]. A further point of similarity with the French system is that there is only one present:

PAST TIME	PRESENT TIME	FUTURE TIME
Aorist		Categorical future
CHUIREAS CHUIRIS CHUIR SÉ CHUIREAMAR CHUIREABHAR CHUIREADAR		CUIRFEAD CUIRFIR CUIRFIDH SE CUIRFIMID CUIRFITHI CUIRFID
Consuetudinal past	Consuetudinal present	Hypothetical future (conditional)
CHUIRINN CHUIRTEA CHUIREADH SÉ CHUIRIMIS CHUIREADH SIBH CHUIRIDIS	CUIRIM CUIRIR CUIREANN SE CUIRIMID CUIRTI CUIREANN SIAD	CHUIRFINN CHUIRFEA CHUIRFEADH SÉ CHUIRFIMIS CHUIRFEADH SIBH CHUIRFIDIS

Like Spanish, Irish has two verbs denoting existence; the first, *is* (see above), known as the *copula*, is used to identify and classify (more or less as with Spanish *ser*). This verb, which is invariable with respect to aspect, person and number, roughly corresponds to *c'est* in French (*c'est* = IS, *ce n'est pas* = NI, *c'était* = BA, *ce n'était pas* = NIOR); IS/NI is used for the present, BA/NIOR for the past, the conditional and the subjunctive; there is no future. The complete paradigm of choices with respect to the example [1] above would therefore be:

PREDICATE		SUBJECT	
Copula	Complement		Nominal component
<i>present</i>	noun	adjective	pronoun
IS (affirmative) NI (negative)	EIREANNACH	BINN BREAGACH	MISE
<i>past</i>			
BA (affirmative) NIOR (negative)			
	<i>Irishman</i>	<i>sweet lying</i>	

<sup>3</sup> This is the term used by Irish grammarians to designate the Irish iterative past.

A second verb composed of a number of Indo-European roots<sup>4</sup>, sometimes known as BHEITH, sometimes, TA, is used for location in time and space. The problem of the expressive limitations posed by a consuetudinal or generic present has been solved by the importation into the conjugation of a supplementary form, TA, (the Indo-European root *\*sta-/stō-* — *estar* in Spanish). This addition means that Irish can distinguish formally between the equivalent of "the weather is fine now" (TA AN AIMSEAR GO DEAS ANOIS) and "the weather is habitually nice in summer": (BIONN AN AIMSEAR GO DEAS IN SAN TSAMRA.) The Hibernian English version of this aspect would normally be "the weather *does be* fine in the summer". Today, however, this version would be considered substandard by the vast majority.

[3]a "the weather is fine now": TA AN AIMSEAR GO DEAS ANOIS.  
*verb art. noun particle adjective temp. adv*  
*is the weather [in a state of being] fine now.*

[3]b "the weather is habitually nice in summer":  
BIDHEANN AN AIMSEAR GO DEAS IN SAN TSAMHRA.  
*verb art. noun particle adjective temp. adjunct*  
*does be the weather [in a state of being] fine in the summer.*

Below is the complete conjugation of this second verb denoting existence:

PAST TIME	PRESENT TIME	FUTURE TIME
<i>aorist</i>		<i>categorical future</i>
(DO) BHIDHEAS	TAIM	BEIDHEAD
(DO) BHIDHIS	TAIR	BEIDHIR
(DO) BHI SE	TA SE	BEIDH SE
(DO) BHIDHEAMAR	TAIMID	BEIDHMID
(DO) BHIDHEABHAR	TATHAOI	BEITHI
(DO) BHIDHEADAR	TALAD	BEIDHID
<i>consuetudinal past</i>	<i>consuetudinal present</i>	<i>hypothetical future</i>
(DO) BHIDHINN	BIDHIM	BHEINN
(DO) BHITHEA	BIDHIR	BHEIFEA
(DO) BHIDHEADH SE	BIDHEANN SE	BHEADH SE
(DO) BHIMIS	BIDHMID	BHEIMIS
(DO) BHIDHEADH SIBH	BITHI	BHEADH SIBH
(DO) BHIDHDIS	BIDHID	BHEIDIS

The situation for the present of most verbs is, in fact, similar — though not identical to the situation in English, where the ability of the verb to be represented as co-extensive with the moment of utterance depends on its semantic content. Co-extensivity is therefore confined generally to verbs of perception and those denoting states rather than actions. Thus the verb CLUINIM (I hear), in the following example, is understood to be co-extensive rather than consuetudinal. The example is taken from a passage

<sup>4</sup> This paradigm has special dependent forms: — AN BHFUIL TU SASTA ? (are you satisfied ?) TA (yes), NIL (no, I'm not).

near the end of the story. It tells how one of the hero's helpers, a man with exceptional hearing, puts his ear to the ground to hear how a race is progressing:

The short green man thought it long until they were coming, and he said to the earman. "Lay your ear to the ground and try are they coming."

I hear the hag a'coming," said he : "but the footman is in his sleep, and I can hear him snoring. (Hyde, 1910, p. 43)

[4] "CLUINIM," AR SEISEANN, "AN CHAILLACH AG TEACHT [...]"  
*verb/pres/1<sup>st</sup>p. sing. verb dem. pron. art. noun prep. verbal noun*  
*hear I said himself the witch at come*

The translation of TEACHT by "coming" is misleading. As previously stated, Irish has no present participle. When it comes to verbs which have no nominal equivalent in English, it is difficult to give an exact idea of the temporal image projected by the verbal noun. The example of a lexeme like "pray", where there is a nominal form (*prayer*) and a verb (*to pray, prayed, praying*) can perhaps provide a clear idea: the Irish equivalent of "She is praying" would be "She is *at prayer*". The description of this type of construction in recent Irish grammars as the progressive form is an extremely regrettable mistake. Not only does it commit the error of analysing Irish through the filter of a Germanic system, but it draws attention away from the important distinction made between *dynamic* and *static* events. The completion of [4] should illustrate this opposition.

[4]' "CLUINIM," AR SEISEANN, "AN CHAILLACH AG TEACHT  
*verb/pres/1<sup>st</sup>p. sing. verb dem. pron. art. noun prep. verbal noun*  
*hear I says himself the witch at come*

AGUS TA AN COISIRE IN A CODHADH AGUS É AG SRANNFARTUIGH.  
*conj. verb/pres. art. noun prep. poss.art. vb.noun conj. pers. p. prep. vb. noun*  
*and is the legman in his sleep and he at snore*

The verb "sleep", like the verbs "stand" (SEASAMH), "sit" (SUIGH) and "lie" (LUIGH), denotes a state and is therefore actualised by the preposition I(N) and the possessive article A (in his sleep); TEACHT ("come") and SRANNFARTUIGH ("snore") are dynamic processes and are consequently actualised by AG ("at"): "a-coming", "a-snoring". Douglas Hyde's translation provides a good example of the difference between standard English and the English spoken by the country people in Ireland at the turn of the century:

Hiberno-English: "I hear the hag a'coming," said he ; "but the footman is in his sleep, and I hear him a'snoring".

Standard English: I can hear the witch coming and the runner snoring, sound asleep.

This syntactic pattern (TA + nom. AG + verbal noun) can be associated with the other five forms of the conjugation of the verb "be":

	<i>verb</i>	<i>nom. group</i>	<i>complement</i>
(is)	TA	AN COISIRE	IN A CODHLADH AGUS É AG SRANFARTUIGH,
(does be)	BIDHEANN	SÉ (he)	
(was)	DO BHI		
(used to be)	DO BHIDHEADH		
(will be)	BEADH		
(would be)	DO BHEADH		

This arrangement of components results in a separation, in terms of the Guillaumian distinction of "event-time" and "universe time"<sup>5</sup>. In other words the system is composed of a two-term *aspectual* contrast opposing perfectivity (TA, DO BHI, DO BHEADH) to imperfectivity (BIDHEANN, DO BHIDHEADH, and DO BHEADH) with a three-term *temporal* opposition opposing present, past and future. This means that the initial conjugated verb locates the grammatical subject temporally and aspectually with respect to the moment of utterance, while the particles (pronouns and prepositions) which determine the verbal noun provide the aspectual contour of the event itself.

These six forms make up a paradigm ("*be*" + *subject* + *preposition* AG + *verbal noun*) which generates the equivalent of the English progressive. Relations of possession are constructed on a variation of this pattern: "*be*" + *subject* + AG + *person*. The following example refers to a pair of scissors the king of Ireland's son had to keep over night on pain of losing his head. The lady drugs the hero with the "pin of slumber" and gives the scissors to the King of Poison for safe keeping. The short green man restores it to the hero. This fragment also draws attention to the fact that Irish, which has no equivalent of "yes" or "no", affirms and negates through use of the predicative verb.

When she was gone the King of Poison fell into his sleep; and when he was in his sleep the short green man came, and the rusty sword in his hand, and wherever it was the king had left the scissors out of his hand, he found it. He gave it to the king of Ireland's son, and when she (the lady) came in the morning, she

<sup>5</sup> "Event time" (*temps d'événement*) concerns the "different ways of representing the internal temporal constitution of the situation" denoted by the lexical verb (Comrie, 1976), whereas "universe time" (*temps d'univers*, cf. Roch Valin) concerns the inscription of the event with respect to the moment of utterance. In other words, *event time* concerns aspect, *universe time*, *tense*.



asked: "Son of the king of Ireland, have you the scissors?"  
"I have," said he. (Hyde, 1910, p. 39)

[5] [...] NUAIR THAINIG SISE AIR MAIDIN D"FIARUIGH SÈ,  
*conj. verb/past dem.pron prep noun verb/past pron.*  
*when came herself (celle-ci) in morning asked she*

"A MHIC RIGH EIREANN AN BHFUIL AN SIOSUR AGAT? "TÀ", AR SEISEAN.  
*voc. (noun noun noun/gen.) int.part.verb art. noun pers. prep. verb verb dem. pron.*  
*o son king Ireland is the scissors at you? Is says himself (celui-ci)*

### THE EXPRESSION OF ASPECT: PROSPECTIVE AND RETROSPECTIVE

Once again, this example illustrates the difference between Hiberno- and standard English:

Hiberno-English: When she came in the morning, she asked: "Son of the king of Ireland, have you the scissors?"  
 -- "I have," said he.

Standard English: When she came to him next morning, she asked the King of Ireland's son if he still had the scissors. "I do" said he.

The insertion of the past participle between the nominal group and the conjugated preposition provides a frame which is generally regarded by grammarians as the Irish equivalent to the English present perfect. This can be illustrated by adding the verbal adjective "caillte" (lost) to the above example:

[5]' AN BHFUIL AN SIOSUR CAILLTE AGAT? "TÀ", AR SEISEAN.  
*int. part. verb art. noun verbal adjective prep. pers; verb dem. pronoun*  
*is the scissors lost at you Is says himself (celui-ci)*

Hibernian English: "Have you the scissors lost?" "I have," says himself.

Standard English: "Have you lost the scissors?" "Yes, I have," he replied.

A second pattern involving a compound preposition (D'ÉIS or TAR ÉIS: "after") is used when it comes to locating the agentive subject in the aftermath of a completed event.

[6] TA SÉ D'ÉIS SGRÍOBHTHA.  
*verb/pres pronoun preposition verbal adjective/gen.*  
*is he after written*

Hibernian English: he is after writing.

Standard English: he has just written. (Il vient d'écrire)

When it comes to the Pluperfect, the examples below, taken from the Christian Brother's *Grammar of Spoken Irish*, give a general idea of how this construction was regarded by the academic community at the turn of the century. The word for word translation has been added for the sake of clarity.

English	Irish	literally...
He died	FUAIR      SÉ      BAS <i>get/past    pro.3°    death/nom.</i> <i>got          he          death</i>	he got death
He had just died	BHI      SÉ      D'EIS      BAIS      D'FHAGHAIL <i>be/past    p.pron.    prep.    noun/gen.    to/verbal .noun</i> <i>was        he          after    death        to get</i>	he was after dying
He had just broken the chair	BHI      SÉ      D'EIS      NA CATHAOIREACH <i>be/past    p.pron    prep        art.gen.    noun/gen.)</i> <i>was        he          after        the chair</i> DO      BHRISEADH <i>part.      verbal noun</i> <i>to           break</i>	he was after breaking the chair
He had broken the chair.	BHI      AN CHATHAOIR      BRISTE      AIGE <i>verb/past    art+noun      verb. adj.    prep pronoun</i> <i>was           the chair      broken        at him</i>	he had the chair broken

It would be misleading to give the impression that the above patterns enter into a one-to one correspondence with the pluperfect. The above examples give a simplified idea of the situation in the most basic structures. In a narrative context, the difference between the Irish and English systems becomes more apparent. In the case of the following example, taken from the conclusion of the story, it is clear that the periphrastic *ta+noun + verbal adjective+ag /person* would be translated by the preterite not the pluperfect:

She (the lady) had a road three miles long, and sharp needles of steel shaken on it as thick as the grass and their points up. Said the short green man to the man who broke the stones with the side of his thigh: "Go and blunt those." That man went on them with the double thigh, and he made powder and prashuck of them. The king of Ireland's son came and walked the three miles, and then he had his wife gained. (Hyde, 1910, p. 45)

[7] THAINIG MACRIGH ÉIREANN AGUS SHIUBHAIL SÉ NA TRI MHILE,  
*verb/past (noun - noun- noun/gen) conj. verb/past p.pron. art.plu. numeral noun*  
*came son king Ireland and walked he the three miles*

AGUS BHI A BHEAN GNOTHUIGHTHE AIGE.  
*conj. verb/past poss. art. noun verbal adjective /gen prep/pronoun*  
*and was his wife gained at him*

In standard English, the Hibernian English “*he had his wife gained*” would be more accurately translated by the preterite rather than by the pluperfect:

The king of Ireland's son arrived and walked the three miles, and in this way he won his wife. (? so he had won his wife)

This example indicates that the Irish syntactic pattern has more to do with setting up an agent/patient relation between two entities — in this case the hero is the agent, the princess the patient — than with establishing relations of anteriority between two processes, which, according to Benveniste, is the main function of both the present and the past perfect (see above). As Douglas Hyde pointed out, in Irish, there is quite simply neither *means* nor *need* to make this relation of anteriority explicit. The following examples suggest that, when there is reference to a lapse of time preceding an event located in the past, the relation between the two periods of time is expressed through *negation* and *comparison*<sup>6</sup>. This first extract is taken from the opening passage of the tale:

There was a king's son in Ireland long ago, and he went out and took with him his gun and his dog. There was snow out. He killed a raven. The raven fell on the snow. He never saw anything whiter than the snow, or blacker than the raven's skull, or redder than its share of blood. (Hyde, 1910, p.19)

[8] NI FHACAIDH SÉ AON RUD BUDH GHILE 'NA AN SNEACTA, NA BUDH  
*neg verb/past p.pron. nua. noun comp. adj. comp. art. noun conj. comp*  
*not saw he one thing as bright as the snow nor as*

DHUIBHE 'NA CLOIGIONN AN FHIADH DHUIBH, NA BUDH DHEIRGE NA  
*adj. conj. (noun art. noun adj)gen conj. comp. adj. comp.*  
*black as skull the crow black nor as red as*

A CHUID FOLA BHI 'GA DORTADH AMACH  
*art. noun noun verb/past prep verbal noun adverb*  
*his portion blood was at spill out*

Standard English: He had never before seen anything whiter than the snow, nor blacker than the raven's skull, nor redder than the blood that was pouring out.

<sup>6</sup> In a recent article, A. Joly presents these basic mechanisms as fundamental to the edification of language. (“*Contraster, additionner et soustraire* représentent trois activités qui sont au cœur de l’édification du langage”, 1998, p. 180). It is a hypothesis worth looking into that before the introduction of the compound tenses (*present perfect* in English, *passé composé* in French, etc.) that negation (*soustraire*) and comparison (*contraster*) were called upon to express what is now dealt with by the *perfect* or *transcendent* aspect (G. Guillaume).

In translating this sentence, Douglas Hyde has added the negative adjective *never*. In fact the literal translation would be "did not see". However, "never" can be justified by the conjunction of the negative particle NI and the numeral AON (not +one = none) : he *did not* see *one* thing: "any thing at all"<sup>7</sup>. This is another way of saying that such a sight was "not part of his past experience".

If the story-teller had felt it necessary to insist on this aspect, he could have added the adverb RIAMH ("up until this point")<sup>8</sup>. This indicates, that in Irish, where the absence of a resultative auxiliary such as "have" excludes a retrospective transcendent view, a period of time preceding an event located in the past is conceptualised as an *ascendent* movement which converges with the event expressed by the verb, either in the past tense or in the present tense. With present and future tenses the equivalent adverbial expression is GO DEO, which designates a similar movement stretching forward into the future.

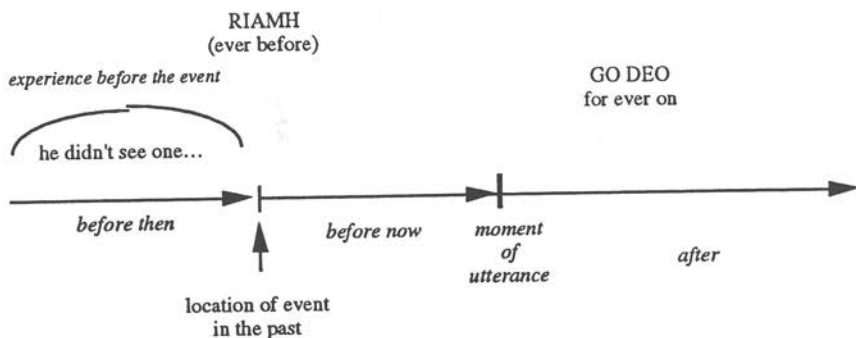


Fig. 1

This exclusively ascending representation of time means that *when* is often replaced by *until*.

The next example, which has recourse once again to negation and comparison, is taken from the passage describing the first encounter made by the hero on his journey to the Eastern World. Note that when the subject is detached from the verb, the verb (TA in this case) marks only aspect and tense being invariable with respect to person and number:

<sup>7</sup> Irish has no indefinite article. The numeral *one*, "aon" is used to mean "one" in an affirmative context and "none" in a negative one, which is the case here.

<sup>8</sup> The temporal reference point for RIAMH can either be some moment in the past or the moment of utterance. Either ways the duration of the time referred to is spanned prospectively. This means there are two possible values : (i) *ever before up until that point in the past*, (ii) *ever before until now*.

The day on the morrow he set out, and money was not plenty, but he took with him twenty pounds. It was not far he went until he met a funeral, and he said that it was as good for him to go three steps with the corpse. He had not the three steps walked until there came a man and left his writ down on the corpse for five pounds.  
(Hyde, 1910, p. 21)

[9] NIOR BHFADA CHUAIDH SÉ GUR CASADH FEAR GEARR GLAS DO  
*neg/past adj. verb/past p. pron. conj/past verb/past noun-adj.-adj pers.prep*  
*not long went he that broke man short green on him*

AGUS D'FHRIAFRAIG SÉ DHÉ CA RAIBH SÉ DUL.  
*conj. verb/past p. pron. pers. prep int. pron. verb/past p. pron. verb. noun*  
*and enquired he of him where was he go*

Hiberno- English: **Not far did he go until** he met a short green man.

Standard English: *He had not gone far when* he came across a short green man.

The difference between the Hiberno-Irish ascendent representation and the Standard English retrospective one can be illustrated visually as follows:



Fig. 2

The Guillaumean distinction between *immanence* and *transcendence* can be called upon to explain the difference between these two representations. The auxiliary "had" has a double function: (i) on the one hand it establishes that the event took place at a point in time prior to the moment of utterance, (ii) on the other hand it indicates that at that precise point in time, the event expressed by the past participle had reached its term. This means that the grammatical subject, *he*, is located in a time-sphere posterior to the temporal location of the event. The subject is located in the *transcendency* (G. Guillaume) or *aftermath* (A. Joly and W. Hirtle) of the past event<sup>9</sup>. From this point, the event is viewed *retrospectively*.

<sup>9</sup> This analysis is confirmed by the Hiberno-English "he was *after* travelling a short distance".

In defining the present perfect, Comrie (1976) speaks of "the continuing present relevance of a past situation". By transposition in the past, the value of the pluperfect, generally speaking, can be accounted for in terms of "the momentary past relevance of a past situation". In the Irish version, the absence of an auxiliary verb means that both subject and event share the same temporal location; this is simply another way of saying that the subject remains in the *immanence* of the event. The absence of a retrospective view explains the Hiberno-English association of the prospective preterite with *until*.

These theoretical considerations offer, I hope, a plausible explanation for what must seem at first sight a rather eccentric way of treating the English aspecto-temporal system. In the following extracts ([10] — [14]), I have tried to compile a representative selection of the Hiberno-English treatment of subordinate clauses, the original Irish source has been omitted, the standard English version is my own personal suggestion.

[10] Hiberno-English: There were three scores of skulls of the people that **went to look for her** set on spikes round about the castle, and she thought that she would have his head on a spike along with them.

S. E.: There were sixty skulls, belonging to the people who *had come* to ask for her hand, set on spikes around the castle and she thought that she would have his head on a spike as well.

[11] Hiberno-English: She placed a pin of slumber under his head, and he fell asleep as **he fell the night before**, and she stole the comb with her.

S. E.: She placed a pin of slumber under his head, and he fell asleep as *he had done* the night before, and she made off with the comb.

[12] Hiberno-English: She gave the comb to the King of Poison, and said to him not to lose the comb as **he lost** the scissors.

S. E. : She gave the comb to the King of Poison, and told him not to lose the comb *in the way he had lost* the scissors.

[13] Hiberno-English: When morning came, the king of Ireland's son woke up and began lamenting the comb which was gone from **him**.

S. E.: When morning came, the king of Ireland's son woke up and began lamenting the comb *which had disappeared*.

[14] Hiberno-English: She came the third night, and said to the son of the king of Ireland's son to have for her the head of him who **was combed with** that comb, on the morrow morning.

S. E.: She came on the third night, and told the son of the king of Ireland that on the following morning, he must give her the head that *had been combed* with that comb.

## ANNEX

*Summary*

The King of Ireland's son goes out one morning and shoots a raven. At the sight of the three contrasting colours: red blood, black feathers and white snow, he makes a vow (or *geasa*) not to rest until he has won the hand of a maiden with hair as black as the raven's skull, skin as white as the snow and cheeks as red as the blood. As the only woman possessing these qualities lives in the Eastern World, the young man collects all the money he has (20 pounds according to this version) and sets off to win her hand. He has not gone far when he meets up with a funeral. When he discovers that the dead man cannot be buried until his debts are redeemed, he settles the matter himself and goes on his way, having thus given away half the money he had collected for the journey. He has not gone far when he meets up with a small green man who offers to go into his service in return for "the first kiss of his wife if he should get her." On the short green man's advice, he takes into his service a series of characters. Each has an exceptional talent. The first is a marksman with superhuman eyesight, the second has such exceptional hearing that he can hear the grass grow, the third can run more swiftly than the hare, the strength of the fourth man's breath is such that he can "turn round a windmill with one nostril", the fifth is so strong that he can crush rocks with a single thigh. They all ask in payment for their services "the place of a house and garden". On their journey to the Eastern World they meet up with three giants and thanks to the cunning of the small green man they acquire three magic weapons : a cap that makes the wearer invisible, a sword that reduces the enemy to smithereens and boots that allow the wearer to run as swiftly as the wind (seven league boots). When they finally arrive at the castle of the lady, they discover the heads of the sixty previous suitors on spikes around the castle. The lady, aided by the King of Poison and the hag, sets the hero three impossible tasks. Thanks to the advice of the small green man and the exceptional capacities of the servants, the lady is forced to capitulate and marry the hero. The story ends as follows:

*Hiberno-English*

The couple were married then, and the first kiss was for the short green man. The short green man took the wife with him into a chamber and started on her. She was full up of serpents and the king's son would have been killed with them when he went into his sleep but that the short green man picked them out of her. He came then to the son of the

*Standard English*

The marriage took place, and the short green man claimed the first kiss that had been promised to him. He took the lady into the bed chamber and started kissing her. She was full of serpents which would have killed the king's son once he had gone to sleep if the short green man had not plucked them out of her. Then he went to the king of

king of Ireland, and told him : "You can go with your wife now. I am the man who was in the coffin that day, for whom you paid the ten pounds ; and these people who are with you, they are servants whom God has sent to you."

The short green man and his people went away then, and the king of Ireland's son never saw them again. He brought his wife home , and they spent a happy life together.

(Hyde, 1910, p. 47)

Ireland's son and said to him : "You can go off with your wife now. I am the man who was in the coffin that day, for whose sake you paid the £10. and the people here are servants that God sent to assist you."

The short green man and his people went off after that, and the king's son never set eyes on them again. He travelled home with his wife and they lived happily ever after.

In his preface to *Beside the Fire*, Douglas Hyde comments on the similarity between this story and the Bohemian folktale "George and the Goat". The obvious connection indicates, in his opinion, that this story, part of a common Indo-European heritage, which bears traces of a nature myth, must be at least 3,000 years old. The man with the strong breath represents the wind, the man has wonderful eyesight, daylight, etc. There are several versions in Ireland, my favorite being Padruig Colum's children's tale, which has been recently translated into French.

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