

PREPOSITIONAL PRONOUNS IN A TRANSITIONAL DIALECT

AMONG the paradigms showing considerable variation from dialect to dialect in Irish are those of the so-called prepositional pronouns. A glance at a few dialect monographs will readily reveal the great variety in the forms of these paradigms in different regions. The data here reported represent an area where Irish is no longer spoken, the district just west of Clifden, Co. Galway. The source of the data is a narrative text of approximately fifty pages, written most likely in the United States around the turn of the century by an emigrant to the U.S. from Faulkerragh, Co. Galway. The manuscript is now National Library of Ireland MS G 1137. Its author, Patrick Lyden, was born in 1832; the language of the text thus represents that of the mid-nineteenth century.¹

The data provided by this text are of interest not only historically, in providing information about a period from which little written material survives, but also dialectally, in that the area of provenance falls just on the major isogloss proposed by Ó Máille (1927: § 472) as dividing Connacht dialects. Since Lyden was unschooled in Irish, he wrote his story in an idiosyncratic orthography which suggests no knowledge of classical spelling conventions, and which thus provides more information about local pronunciation and morphology than texts using a more standard orthography. A careful examination of the text, then, can reveal information which will contribute to a more precise delineation of the isoglosses for specific linguistic features of the relevant dialects, and of the time frame for certain recent developments. This paper will examine the preposition paradigms found in the text with this goal in mind.²

Full paradigms can be constructed from the text for the prepositions *ag* and *ar*, and paradigms with only one or two forms missing for *do*, *le*, *roimh*, and *chuig*. In addition, the full plural paradigm for *idir* is attested, along with partial paradigms for *de*, *ó*, *in*, *as*, *trí*, and *thar*.

¹ A general report on the language of this manuscript was presented to the Sixth International Congress of Celtic Studies, Galway, in 1979, and a more detailed description is in preparation. Although commentary in the text indicates that it was written when Lyden was an old man, we can take the language to represent that spoken in the area during his youth, especially as it is likely that he used English predominately after emigrating.

² The forms in the text were compared with those reported in the available dialect monographs for Connacht: de Bhaldraithe (1953) for south Connacht, and Mhac an Fhailigh (1968) and de Búrca (1958) for north Connacht, and in Wagner (1979) for the more northern dialect of Teileann, Co. Donegal. Prepositional data from Wagner (1966) were also examined for several atlas points around the Clifden area (points 43–54) for confirmation of the forms cited in the monographs. The atlas data provided no surprises with respect to the generalizations proposed here.

The six most complete paradigms are given in table 1:³

TABLE 1

AG:	aig (eag, ag, eg)	
	sg.	pl.
	1. agam	agan
	aum, am	aggan
	2. agad	aggee
	aggad	agee
	aud, ad	
	3 m. eggah	accue
	egga, egah	ackue
		acce
	f. eckee	
AR:	air (ear)	
	sg.	pl.
	1. orm, orom	orun, oron
	oram	
	2. orth	oree
	airth	
	3 m.air	orhove
	ar, er, ear	orhoe
		orhue, orhoo
	f. orhee	
DO:	goh (guh)	
	sg.	pl.
	1. yum	yoon
	um	
	dhum	
	2. yuth	yeeve
	yut	yeavh, yoeve
	3 m. yoh	yove
	yow, yo, yoo, yooh, youh	youve, yoave
	youch	doave
	doh, dho	
	goh	
	f. ———	

³The most commonly occurring form of the base preposition is given first, with alternate forms in parentheses. For each inflected form, the most frequent spelling is given on a line of its own. Where two forms occur on the first line, they are equally frequent in the text. Below, and indented, are the (often considerably) less common variants. Variant forms on a separate line may represent distinct pronunciations, as for *agad* vs *aud*, *ad*.

LE:	leah (lea, leii)	
	sg.	pl.
	1. leom	_____
	liom	
	2. leath	live, luive
	lath	
	3 m. leash	leove
	lesh, leish, leaish	love, leovh, loeve, luve
	leas, less, leaas	
	f. _____	
ROIMH:	_____	
	sg.	pl.
	1. room	_____
	2. rooth	rooyee
	3 m. rivah	rumpue
	rivvah, rivvih	
	ruvie	
	arivvah	
	f. _____	
CHUIG:	heg	
	sg.	pl.
	1. huggam	huggan
	2. hugad	_____
	3 m. higgah, heggah	huccue
	f. _____	

The plural paradigm for *idir*, and the partial paradigms for the remaining attested prepositions are shown in table 2.

TABLE 2

IDIR: **eader, eder**; 1 pl.: ataroon; 2 pl.: adree; 3 pl.: atherove.
 Ó: **o**; 1 sg.: wyme, wim; 2 sg.: wet, weth; 3 sg. m.: y; 3 pl.: wofoe.
 DE: **goh**; 1 sg.: yeem, yeeme, deem; 3 sg. m.: yoh (youch, yeoh);
 3 pl.: yeeove, yove, yeef, dioeve.
 FAOI: **fee**; 3 sg. m.: fee, fuee; 3 sg. f.: fuhee; 3 pl.: foohove.
 AS: **aus**; 3 sg. m.: aus (ais, as); 3 pl.: astove, astoo.
 TRI: **rhee**; 3 sg. m.: rheed.
 THAR: 3 pl.: hartoo.

In a number of forms, differences among the dialects are minimal, and the orthography of the text is compatible with either the forms cited for Cois Fhairrge or those given for Erris, the two closest regions for which extensive descriptions are available. This is true, for example, for most of the simple prepositions, with exceptions to be discussed below, and for most first and second person singular, third person singular masculine, and first person plural forms.

For the remaining parts of the prepositional paradigm, the dialects compared differ significantly in phonology and morphology, and the language of the text can be identified with some certainty as similar to one or the other of the dialects examined. It is of interest that the association is not uniformly with either the northern or southern Connacht forms. Thus, the text does provide evidence for the refinement of isoglosses for certain parts of the prepositional paradigm. These cases will be discussed below.

From the forms in tables 1 and 2, we can see that the simple forms of *de* and *do* have fallen together as /gə/ already by this period, as is typical of the contemporary dialects of Cois Fhairrge and Erris as well. The inflected forms also show lenition of the initial consonant – indicated in the text by the spelling with *y* – which is a stronger feature of south Connacht than of the northern dialects. Forms in /d/ are rare in Cois Fhairrge, as de Bhaldraithe (1953:142) indicates, as they are throughout Connemara. Mhac an Fhailigh, on the other hand, lists only forms in /d/ in his paradigms, noting that lenited forms also exist, as if less commonly. Similarly the data given in de Búrca and Wagner for Tourmakeady and Teileann show variation, but with apparent predominance of the /d/ forms. The text here described thus corresponds more closely to the southern facts; out of a total of more than one hundred forms of these two prepositions in the text, only nine /d/ forms appear, all following homorganic consonants. In the first and second person singular forms of *ag*, the text patterns with Cois Fhairrge as well, in showing reduced monosyllabic forms, although these are relatively uncommon in the text.⁴ Similarly, the forms of *roimh*, spelt with *oo*, attest to the vowel raising from /o:/ to /u:/, which is likewise found in Cois Fhairrge, but not in the northern dialects for this preposition.

On the other hand, some second person plural forms show greater similarity to Mayo than to south Connacht. No trace of the /b'/ typical of Cois Fhairrge 2 pl. monosyllabic forms appears in the text. Instead, as in Erris and Teileann, we find a fricative in such forms. Three are attested: *libh*, *dhaobh*, and *dhíbh*. In disyllabic 2 pl. forms, however, the text follows Erris and Cois Fhairrge in having a long vowel (/i:/, spelt *ee*), as opposed to Teileann, which retains the consonantal ending. Our text differs from all available sources in treating *roimh* as a disyllable in 2 pl.: spelt *rooyee*, but the vowel is compatible with the other Erris/Cois Fhairrge disyllabic forms.

The forms of *chuíg* are compatible with those cited for Teileann; in Cois Fhairrge and Erris, this paradigm has fallen together with that of

⁴It is not surprising to find the loss of /g/ here, since O'Rahilly indicates (1932:217) that loss of /g/ is typical of northern dialects generally (as opposed to those of Munster), although no indication of loss is shown in the monographs on Erris or Tourmakeady. The 1 pl. forms are considerably less frequent than the singular, and the absence of a reduced form in the plural is likely therefore to be an accidental gap in the data.

ag, except under special circumstances (de Bhaldraithe 1953:141 n. 2; Mhac an Fhailigh 1968:205). However, our text clearly distinguishes *ag* from *chuig* in all cases by the presence of the initial /h/ in the latter, and thus appears to represent an earlier stage than that of either of the two modern neighbouring dialects, suggesting a relatively recent date for the collapse of the two paradigms in these areas.

The third person forms are by far the commonest in the text, and provide the richest source of information regarding the dialect. Masculine singular forms are attested for all prepositions, although as above there is in several cases little to distinguish the dialects. For *ag*, *ar*, *faoi*, *roimh*, and *le*, the 3 sg. m. representations in the text are compatible with the phonetics of all three areas being compared; the forms of *trí* and *ó* are compatible with forms found in both Erris and Cois Fhairrge, but not in Teileann or Tourmakeady. For *in* and *as*, the text appears to show a long vowel (written *au*) in most occurrences, but as noted the consistency of spelling is not sufficiently great, especially where low vowels are concerned, to guarantee this interpretation; the spelling may also represent the short vowel of the northern areas, or even the schwa found most notably in Teileann. As is common in Cois Fhairrge and other south Connacht dialects, the 3 sg. m. forms of *de* and *do* have fallen together completely as /γo:/, most commonly spelt *yoh*. Only one occurrence of *dhe* in the text shows any possibility of a front vowel, in the form *yeoh*, which is nonetheless ambiguous with respect to the vowel. This collapsing of the two prepositions differentiates the text from the north Connacht and Donegal paradigms, which consistently distinguish the vowels of the 3 sg. m. (although Wagner (1978:198) notes that the two are often mixed in speech).

Feminine forms are relatively rare in the text – only eight are attested, three each for *ag* and *ar*, and one each for *faoi* and *in*. These appear to conform closely to the north Connacht dialects for the most part, and to differ from Cois Fhairrge in retaining a final long vowel /i:/ in the second syllable, where Cois Fhairrge shows schwa or merger with a preceding vowel. Only *fúithi* (*fuhee*) may differ from all reported dialects in the medial consonant. Cois Fhairrge has lost medial /h/, and both Erris and Teileann show a fricative here. Since there is no absolutely consistent spelling for standard *ch* in the text, it is possible that the /h/ here does in fact represent a fricative; one cannot be certain.⁵ The final vowel, at least, is northern. The third person plural is represented for every preposition attested in the text, and it is here that the transitional nature of the dialect, both synchronically and diachronically, shows most clearly. There is no trace of the south Connacht /b'/ ending described in de Bhaldraithe (1953:141–4). Instead, plural forms end either in a

⁵Throughout the text, the number of occurrences of slender medial /x'/ spelt *h* and *ch* is approximately equal. Medial *th* (in standard orthography) is spelt *ch* about half as often as it is spelt *h* in the manuscript. It is thus difficult to draw any firm conclusions about the interpretation of the Lyden orthography in these cases.

vowel, usually /u(:)/, as in Mayo and Donegal, or in /v/, which I have not seen reported for any other dialect, except as a by-form for *dhíobh* in Cois Fhairrge.⁶ The distribution of forms is as follows. Out of thirteen prepositions attested, eight show the /v/ ending, spelt *ve*. These include all those forms which would be monosyllables in Cois Fhairrge. Two of these, *ó* and *de*, also occur once each with an *f* in place of *v*, reminiscent of the /fə/ ending found in Mayo and Donegal for these and several other prepositions. Two other prepositions, *ar* and *as*, alternate between consonantal and vocalic forms, and the remaining five prepositions show only the vowel. The pattern is illustrated by table 3.⁷

TABLE 3

de	yeef	yeove	
ó	wofoe	wohove	
faoi		foohove	
do		yove	
le		leove	
idir		atherove	
ar		orhove	orhoe
as		astove	astoo
roimh			rumpue
in			inthu
thar			thartoo
chuig			huccue
ag			accue

One by-form of *ag* in 3 pl. occurs spelt *acce*, which may represent a schwa pronunciation of the unstressed vowel. Apart from this, the 3 pl. forms come down clearly on the side of the northern dialects in the use of vocalic and fricative consonant endings. (The two are about equally divided in total number of occurrences – fifty-six vocalic and fifty-five consonantal forms in all.) If we accept O’Rahilly’s (1932:80) analysis of the 3 pl. inflections as deriving from the Old Irish ending *-ib* via depalatalization of /v’/ and subsequent vocalization, then the text suggests that as recently as one hundred to one hundred and fifty years ago, the vocalization process was not complete for all prepositions; *idir* shows no trace of vocalization, whereas *as* and *ar* vary between vocalic and consonantal forms. Similarly, the development of the northern ending *-fa* – /fə/, from /v’+/hə/ (cf. O’Rahilly 1932:217) – seems to have barely begun at this period, at least in this area; only two forms, *de* and *ó*, show any trace of it. In contrast, the forms from Erris, Tourmakeady, Teileann, and all the Atlas points examined uniformly show vocalic 3 pl.

⁶The form is transcribed /di:w/, /ji:w/, which de Bhaldraithe indicates in a footnote occurs in only one expression (1953:142 n. 3). It is quite plausible that both de Bhaldraithe’s transcription /w/ and the text’s spelling *ve* should represent a bilabial fricative, the normal pronunciation of this phoneme (cf. de Bhaldraithe 1966:30, 157).

⁷In table 3, the commonest spellings for each pronunciation are used.

forms for all consonant-final stems, and forms in /f/ for all vowel-final stems.⁸ If the pattern that emerges from table 3 is a correct reflection of the dialect in question and not mere accident, we appear to have a case of lexical diffusion of morphological features (cf. Chen and Wang (1978), Chambers and Trudgill (1989)), nearly completed by our period in the case of the vocalic endings and just under way for one or two lexical items in the case of the /fə/ augment. Further data from the same region and period to confirm or challenge this hypothesis would be most welcome.

A few forms combining the prepositions with an article or possessive form are also found in the text. These show no surprises, but examples are listed here for completeness: *aga*; *oan*, *onah*; *lean*; *feen*; *gun* (= *don* and *den*), *gaw*, *gah* (*do* + *a* and *de* + *a*).

Several instances of uninflected and compound prepositions also appear, including *gun* (*gan*), *tiompall* (*timpeall*), *in* (*chun*), *goh* (*go*), *goh dee* (*go dtí*), *neanacht* (*in éineacht*), *auskeen* (*os cionn*), *lehigh* (*le haghaidh*), *neah*, *nah yeah*, etc. (*i ndiaidh*, *ina dhiaidh*), and *leash* (*tar éis*).

In summary, the general pattern of prepositions in this dialect is that the singular forms of most inflected prepositions conform to the pattern typical of south Connacht, largely as represented in de Bhaldraithe (1953), as do the uninflected and compound prepositions insofar as these can be differentiated among the dialects. But the plural forms, as well as the 3 sg. f. follow more closely northern dialect patterns. It is not always possible to tell if what we have is evidence of regional variation or of chronological variation, since the text represents an earlier period than the data in the dialect monographs. However, where the text differs from the surrounding areas both to the north and south, as is the case for the pronunciation of *chuig*, for example, it seems plausible to suppose that the area in between, had Irish survived there, might have followed its neighbours in the change. The evidence of the text suggests, then, that such features of the modern dialects as the collapse of *chuig* and *ag*, and perhaps the development of the northern 3 pl. forms as well, are most likely fairly recent changes, and that the forms of the text represent an earlier stage of the language than is attested in the contemporary dialects.

⁸There are only two deviations from this pattern in all the data examined. Letterfrack and Tourmakeady each show an example of vocalic *fúthu* in Wagner (1966), and in Teileann, both *leofa* and *leo* are cited by Wagner (1978), the latter as he notes being restricted to old people. Since most speakers interviewed for the Atlas were little more than a generation younger than Lyden, it should be possible to pinpoint the completion of the shift to the modern forms within a relatively short time period, if the conclusions presented here are correct.

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