ONOMATOPEIC INTERJECTIONS IN EARLY IRISH

In language, onomatopeic interjections are generally a feature of informal speech, and are less common in higher registers. In modern English, for example, they are frequent in children’s comics: pain is expressed by *ouch!*, dismay by *eek!*, defiance by *yah!*, awe by *wow!*, disgust by *bah!*, grief by *boo-hoo!*, mirth by *ha-ha!*, disappointment by *aw!*, appreciation of food by *mmm!*, anger by *grrr!*, etc. In Latin and Greek, onomatopeic interjections are commonest in the portrayal of comic or informal speech in drama. In Sanskrit drama similarly employs many such interjections, often in the mouths of people of lower rank.

By contrast, the surviving Early Irish texts contain relatively few onomatopeic interjections. Consequently, this category of word is excluded in Thurneysen’s *Grammar of Old Irish*, Pedersen’s *Vergleichende Grammatik* and Dottin’s *Manuel d’irlandais moyen*. In later accounts of Irish dialects there are some short treatments of onomatopeic interjections, such as that by

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1This article is based on a paper entitled ‘*Uch!*, *ub*!’ and other onomatopeic interjections in Early Irish’ which I gave at the School of Celtic Studies Tionól on 21 March 1986. On 16 November 1989 an expanded version of part of this lecture was given at the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, Aberystwyth, with the title ‘*Uch!*, *ub*!’: war-cries and cries of grief in Irish and Welsh’. I wish to express my gratitude to those who have over the years discussed these forms with me, and stress that all errors and misjudgements are entirely my own responsibility.


In his *Institutiones grammaticae* the sixth-century grammarian Priscian of Caesarea criticized the view that the interjection should be treated as a part of speech in Greek. The Irish glossator on his work expanded on the matter in the eighth-century Codex Sangallensis no. 904: *i.i. indinteriecht nadrann insce la grecu sed apud adauerbium numerant atarinet comroir[c]nich inna grec la ranna insce ol suide as rann insce lalaitnori ‘i.e. the interjection, which is not a part of speech with the Greeks, but (which) they reckon with the adverb. Erroneous persons of the Greeks reckon it with the parts of speech because it is a part of speech with the Latins’ (Whitley Stokes and John Strachan (ed.), *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* ii (Cambridge 1903; repr. Dublin 1987) 75 gloss 26b6). I quote the translation provided by Rijcklof Hofmann, *The Sankt Gall Priscian commentary. Part 1* (Münster 1996) vol. 2, p. 119.


5Holger Pedersen, *Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen* i–ii (Göttingen 1908–13).

de Bhaldraithe in his *Gaeilge Chois Fhairrge: an deilbhíocht*. Equally brief accounts of onomatopeic interjections in Medieval Welsh are to be found in Evans’s *Grammar of Middle Welsh* and Morris-Jones’s *Welsh grammar*. For Medieval Breton, see Hemon’s *Historical morphology and syntax of Breton*.

In this article, I concentrate on onomatopeic interjections which I have noted in Old and Middle Irish texts, and with their derivatives in formal language. I have provisionally arranged them in alphabetic order, though these parts of speech often use sounds which are outside the normal sound-system of a language, and are in consequence especially variable in spelling. For example, the English clicking-sound of disapproval is an imploded [], a sound which is not used elsewhere in the language. It is represented by a variety of spellings. The commonest is tut-tut, which appears in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (hereafter *OED*) s.v. tut. Other attempts to represent this sound in conventional English orthography include tch-tch, tck-tck, chick-chick, tsk-tsk, and chek-chek. P. G. Wodehouse devised the remarkably expressive past tense he t’chk-t’chked in one of his comic novels. Similar variation can be observed in the representation of the English silencing interjection, variously spelled hush!, shh!, shush!, shish!, h’ssh!, etc. These spellings attempt to represent a lengthened /ʃ/ which is not used elsewhere in the English sound-system. Similarly, the variant spellings sist, ist, sit (no. 21 below) do not represent three distinct pronunciations /ʃɪst/, /ɪst/, /ʃɪt/, but are rather to be treated as attempts to render a silencing interjection which cannot be fully represented in Early Irish orthography. Because of the anomalous features of many interjections, there has been a tendency to explain them as loan-words, but in my view this is generally unnecessary: see discussion below on éché, én, fé, gib-gab, gic-goc, hé-hé, ub (and abó). On the other hand, there is little doubt that the later Irish ailliliú of joy derives from the biblical (h)alleluia!

A comprehensive survey of onomatopeic interjections in world languages has not been carried out. However, the evidence from the study of various unrelated languages indicates that some interjections are instinctive and universal. Thus, the ha-ha, hee-hee or ho-ho of mirth is recorded all over the world. The interjection poo is likewise universally associated with disgust. In childish English the noun poo refers to ‘faeces’, and the same element is doubled to form

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12See discussion under alla below.
13Priscian observed: *interjectionum autem pleraeque communes sunt naturaliter omnium gentium uoces* ‘interjections are for the most part by nature common words of all peoples’. This is rendered by the Irish glossator on Codex Sangallensis no. 904: *i. atat allaithi interecta* and *itcoitchena docach ceniul* ‘there are some interjections common to every nation’ (Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* ii 62 (gloss 10a1) = Hofman, *The Sankt Gall Priscian commentary. Part I*. vol. 2, p. 49).
the verb *to pooh-pooh* of conventional English. Other onomatopoeic interjections have different applications and usages in different cultures. For example, a hissing sound may be used to express disapproval in a theatre or other public venue in Europe. In other cultures, however, hissing is used to express respect or admiration. Captain Cook records his surprise that the natives of the New Hebrides expressed their admiration by hissing like geese. In Azerbaijan a staccato /dɔ-dɔ/ may be used to express enjoyment of food rather than the familiar *mmm*. It should also be observed that—to a greater extent than other parts of speech—there is considerable variation between individual speakers in their use of interjections.

I should stress that the following list has no pretensions to completeness, and is merely an attempt to make a preliminary collection of these fascinating but elusive parts of speech. I omit sounds made by inanimate objects, such as *ding-dang* (of a bell), *gricc-gráicc* (of a bell), *stip* (the sound of corn-stubble burning), and *tot* ‘splash’.

1. **abb-abb-abb.**
   
   See under *ub* below.

2. **ahé, ahæ.**
   
   This interjection (in the spelling *ahæ*) is used in the ninth-century Milan Glosses to explain the word *hem* in the Latin commentary on Psalm 117. The gloss provides three different explanations of the word, the first of which is *i. interiacht ebraide ‘i.e. a Hebrew interjection’. However, *hem* is in fact well attested as an interjection in Latin, with most examples coming from the plays of Terence and Plautus. It is mainly used as an interjection of surprise, either in a good or bad sense.

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14 *OED* s.v. *pooh-pooh*. See also Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (hereafter *IEW*) i (Bern 1959) 848 s.v. pū, peye- ‘faulen, stinken’.
15 *OED* s.v. *hiss* (2).
17 Stephen Kelly (personal communication).
18 John O’Donovan (ed.), *Annála ríoghachta Éireann: annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the four masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616* ii (Dublin 1856, repr. 1990) 786 s.a. 1015. Kuno Meyer, ‘Mittelir. *ding dang*’, (Zur keltischen Wortkunde X, Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie 13 (1921) 191–2 § 244) takes it to be an early loan from English, but it could just as well be a native formation.
20 George Calder (ed.), *Araiceapta na n-Éces: the scholars’ primer* (Edinburgh 1917) 132,1701.
22 Whitley Stokes and John Strachan (ed.), *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* i (Cambridge 1901, repr. Dublin 1987) 449.12–13 (Ml. 131c3).
The only other instance of ahé recorded in the Dictionary of the Irish Language is from the Old Irish tale Togail Bruidne Dá Derga. Ingcél asks Fer Rogain about how the reign of King Conaire was regarded: Cid ahé libse a flatius ind fir sin i tír Erend? The form ahé is glossed *i. dno* ‘i.e. indeed, then’ in Mael Muire’s hand in the Lebor na hUidre (LU) version of the tale, and this explanation is followed in Stokes’s translation ‘What then deemest thou, of that man’s reign in the land of Erin?’ This seems more likely than Knott’s suggestion in her Notes (p. 83) that ahé should be taken as equivalent to a á ‘its properties, tokens’.

In Old Irish orthography *h* is normally silent. In this instance, however, it clearly represents an actual *h*-sound: /ahe/. Interjections consisting of a disyllable with an *h* preceded by a short vowel are widespread in language, e.g. English *oho, aha, ahoy, ahem*, Latin *aha, ehem, eho*, Sanskrit ahā, ahē.

3. alla, alla-alla, aill, ale, aili, ole.

Many languages use a hailing or challenging interjection of the type alla, etc. It can be compared with Greek ἀλά: ἀλᾶ ‘loud cry, war-cry’, Lithuanian alioti ‘hails’, and Old Church Slavonic ole! ‘hail!’ There are numerous instances of this hailing or challenging interjection in Early Irish sources. It occurs doubled in the Old Irish tale Fled Bricrenn. Cú Chulainn is on watch in Cú Roí’s fortress at midnight. He hears an approaching noise and shouts Alla-alla! . . . cá fil alla? Mástat carait conná ‘musnágat, mástat námait co ‘mmosralat ‘Hello, hello! who is there? If they are friends let them stay still, if they are enemies let them flee’. Those who approach shout a defiant response and so are immediately killed by Cú Chulainn.

In other contexts, alla or ale commonly expresses surprise, often accompanied by disapproval or dismay. In the Stowe version of the Táin Bó Cuailnge King Conchobar takes Cú Chulainn’s arm after he has attacked the youths on the playing-field of Emain, and says ale, a mhic bic . . . at-ciu ni foilli imbre an macraid ‘hey, young boy . . . I see that it is not gentleness that you inflict on the youths’. There is also dismay in Bricriu’s reaction when his fortress is tipped up, causing him and his wife to fall into a cess-pit: Aill amai . . . tan-catar námait a ndún ‘Woe! . . . enemies have come into the fortress’. Again, in Recension I of the Táin the fearsome warrior Nad Crantail is impaled by a spear thrown up in the air by Cú Chulainn which comes down through the top

27IEW i 29 s.v. alā.
of his head. He addresses Cú Chulainn with admiration: *Amai ole! Is tú láech as dech fil i nHerind* ‘Ho, indeed! You are the best warrior in Ireland’. 31

This interjection may also be used in a weaker sense, where an appropriate translation is usually ‘indeed’. 32 In the Stowe Táin, Mac Roth says mockingly to Daire: *Ale . . . cibe raidhit eclacha do druim do leanna-sa 7 do bidh, na tabair dot aoídh ina dott aire é* ‘Indeed, whatever harlots say on the strength of your drink and your food, pay no heed or attention to it’. 33 In Recension I of the Táin, Fergus mac Róich complains to the people in his tent that his noble fosterson Cú Chulainn is to be killed. The people ask: *Maith aile, cia na maídenn ón?*, which C. O’Rahilly translates ‘Why, who makes such a boast?’ 34

This interjection is often associated with the particle *amae, amai*, whose etymology is obscure. 35 The interjection *fé, fâe* is also regularly associated with the particle *amae*: see no. 10 below.

The interjection *alla*, etc. is to be distinguished from the various reflexes of the biblical exclamation of joy, (*h*)alleluia! Vendryes suggests that the noun *aille* ‘act of praising, giving thanks, grace before meals’ comes from this source. 36 The later borrowing *aillitiú, ailliiú* is well-attested as an exclamation of surprise or pleasure, and in the chorus of songs. 37 In his article, ‘The Irish war-cry’, David Greene takes the Modern Irish *ailliiú* of sorrow to be another use of the same interjection. 38 He quotes Sir James Ware’s reference to the *aleleu* ‘which the meer Irish women are accustomed to repeat with howlings and clapping of hands at the funerals of their friends’, 39 and also compares Derricke’s attribution of the cry *lullalowe* to Irish warriors on being put to flight. 40 However, it seems more probable that these are cases of the ululating cry of sorrow or defeat which is widespread in language, 41 rather than derivatives of the biblical (*h*)alleluia!

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32 This usage can be compared with that of the Sanskrit interjection *alele* (Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford 1899) s.v.).


35 Pedersen, *Vergleichende Grammatik der keltischen Sprachen* ii 188 § 514 (7), suggests a connection with *amein, amin* ‘thus’.

36 LEIA: lettre A (A-34) s.v. *aille*.


39 Walter Harris (ed. and trans.), *The whole works of Sir James Ware concerning Ireland* (Dublin 1764) ii 164.


41 IEW i 1105 s.v. *ul-, ulul-*. 
4. babb.

In his Glossary, the tenth-century scholar Cormac Úa Cuilennáin defines the element babb as an *interiacht adbligthe*, lit. ‘an interjection of aggrandisement’. It occurs in an etymological gloss on *Babbgither*, the name of the noblest pig in Ireland (*nī raibe i n-Ère muc bud grātu*), which belonged to Bres mac Eladain. From the limited context it seems best to take babb to be an interjection expressing favourable astonishment, which might be translated ‘wow!’ or ‘whew!’ in reaction to the impressive size and appearance of the pig.

5. bú, buo, boo.

In the Middle Irish grammatical tract *Auraicecht na n-Èces* the author quotes the principle *nomen de sono factum est* ‘the name has been made from the sound’, and advances the theory that the word bó ‘cow’ is from bú, buo, the Early Irish equivalent of English moo!, and that géd ‘goose’ similarly derives from gō, a sound representing the honking of geese.

Irish bó is cognate with the words for ‘cow, bovine’ in the other languages of the Indo-European group, e.g. Sanskrit gāuh, Greek βούς, Latin bōs, English cow, etc. These words can be traced back to a common root *gou*- , but this is not generally held to be of onomatopeic origin. On the other hand, modern scholarship is at one with the author of *Auraicept na n-Èces* in taking Irish géd—like many bird-names—to be of onomatopeic origin.

6. cú.

The Middle Irish tale *Buile Šuibhne* contrasts the cú made by the cuckoo with the harsh clanging (*gricc-gráicc*) of the church bell: *Binne lem . . . ná gricc-gráicc chlogáin chille / an chú do[ní] cúi Banna ‘Sweeter to me . . . than the gricc-gráicc of the church bell is the cú which the cuckoo of the Bann makes’.

The name of this bird (*cuí*, gen. sg. *cuach*) derives from its call.

7. é.

There is evidence of an interjection of grief, é, which was probably pronounced /æ/. It is attested in a poem on the triumph of Patrick Sarsfield by Dáibhidh Ó Bruidair: *Is é nach maireann géag don ghaisceadh / céile Chaisil chairéisigh ‘Alas, that the fair branch of valour, the spouse / Of the elegant

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42 DIL s.v. *aidbliugd* suggests ‘hyberbolical (?) interjection’.
45 *IEW* i 482–3 and references.
46 *IEW* i 482–3 and references.
49 *LEIA: lettre C (C-9)* s.v. 2 caï; *IEW* i 627 s.v. *kuku*. 
Caiseal, is not alive now’. The pronunciation of earlier attestations given at DIL s.v. 5 é is more uncertain. Thus, a poem in the Middle Irish Metrical Dindshenchas has Hé do díl a dáirfr ‘Woe for thy fate, thou caiff’. Likewise, an explanatory gloss on Old Irish he in the Amra Choluimb Chille has Nó dano is interiecht fegthaíann i truag. i. is truag atá aittreiththaide in betha ro bo lesseom ‘Or then, it is an interjection that is seen there, i.e. hé “alas”, i.e. sad are the inhabitants of the world which he possessed’. In both cases, the pronunciation may have been intended as /e:/ and hence /e:/. However, because of the likely use of /h/ in the interjections ahé and ha, there is also the possibility that /he:/ is intended.

DIL also gives the he he of amusement under the headword 5 é, but I suggest under hé-hé below, that the pronunciation would have been /he: he:/. 8. éché, éché, éche.

There is an instance of this interjection in the Old Irish tale Fled Bricrenn. It serves to emphasise Cú Chulainn’s contempt for Conall Cernach’s horses and chariot: ‘Éché’ for Cú Chulainn, ‘foritir cach amglicu techradsu . . .’, which might be translated ‘“Ha”! said Cú Chulainn, “everyone knows the stupidity of your horses . . .”’.

This interjection also occurs in the Old Irish tale Togail Bruidne Dá Derga. In his edition Stokes translates ‘lo’, following the gloss .i. ni dorcha .i. is follus ‘i.e. it is not dark, i.e. it is manifest’. It is likely that the spelling represents some such sound as /e: he:/ The D iv 2 version of the tale has hé hé, which I suggest below represents /he: he:/. The Egerton 1782 version employs here another interjection, ailti, which is discussed under no. 3 alla, above. For the substitution by a later redactor of one interjection for another, we can compare a passage in the Story of the Death of Máelodrán where the Rawlinson B 512 version has Sta-ta! nachandíusaig ‘hush! lest thou wake him’, while the Rawlinson B 502 version has Sit-sit! arnanchandusca.

References:

53 Henderson, Fled Bricrend 42 § 34 = LU 258.8490.
54 Knott, Togail Bruidne Da Derga 17.554 = LU 214.6976. Knott gives éc as the Yellow Book of Lecan reading, but it occurs at the bottom of a page and is badly smudged (Robert Atkinson (ed.), The Yellow Book of Lecan, a collection . . . in part compiled at the end of the fourteenth century. Photo-lithographic reproduction (Dublin 1896) p. 95a52). It could just as well be read as éc he.
56 Knott, Togail Bruidne Da Derga, Appendix, p. 54 (l. 554) = Stokes, Revue celtique 22, 58 fn. 17.
57 Stokes, Revue celtique 22, 58 fn. 18.
58 See discussion under no. 22 sta, etc. below.
DIL s.vv. éche, ecce raises the possibility that this interjection is from Latin ecce ‘behold’.

9. én, enn.

This interjection is attested only in the phrase én a maic, which occurs three times in Togail Bruidne Dá Derga.59 All instances are at the beginning of rhetorics uttered by the three red horsemen who rode in front of King Conaire to the hostel of Dá Derga. Their action breached one of the geissi or supernatural prohibitions laid upon the king, so his son Lé Fer Flaith rode after them to call them back. He was addressed by each of them in turn, with prophesies of battle and death. In his edition Stokes translates ‘lo my son!’;60 and this interpretation is followed with a query by Knott.61 But the context demands a more negative meaning for this interjection, so I would translate ‘woe, o youth’!

This is supported by the H 3. 18 glossed extract which has é a maic .i. truag a maic.62 Possibly, therefore, én is to be regarded as a nasalised realisation of /é:/ é ‘alas’ discussed at no. 7 above.

On the other hand, in O’Mulconry’s Glossary enn is classed as an interieic[τ]io osten[den]tis ‘interjection of demonstration (?)’, which would appear to support the meaning ‘lo!’63 In his note on this form, Stokes describes it as ‘meaning obscure’,64 and in a footnote compares with a query Latin en and Greek ἔν, both interjections meaning ‘lo!’65 I believe, however, that Paul Russell and Padraic Moran are correct in identifying enn with the Irish interjection én.66

Note further the variant readings inni a meicc,67 einne a maic.68 Might the latter stand for some such sounds as [eː]? But what of inni?

10. fé, fáe, fé-fé.

The interjection fé, fáe expresses sorrow or fear and can be compared with Greek οὐξά, Latin vae, Gothic waí, OEng. wā, Welsh gwae, etc.69 DIL s.v. 1 fé (c) provides a number of instances of this interjection. These include fé scél ‘alas for the news’70 and fáe ritt ‘alas for you’.71 On a few occasions it

61Knott, Togail Bruidne Dá Derga, Glossary, p. 120 s.v. én.
62Stokes, Revue celtique 22, 418; Knott, Togail Bruidne Da Derga, Notes p. 79.
64Ibid. 297.
65Ibid. 253 fn. 1.
66http://www.ascn.cam.ac.uk/irishglossaries/.
67Stokes, Revue celtique 22, 392–33.
68Stokes, Revue celtique 22, 418; Knott, Togail Bruidne Da Derga, Notes, p. 79.
69IEW i 1110–11 s.v. uai.
70Kuno Meyer (ed.), Über die älteste irische Dichtung ii (Berlin 1913) 17 § 3.
is associated with the interjection **amae** (see under *alla* above), e.g., *fe amae*,\(^72\) *fe fe amai*.\(^73\) Under 1 fé (b) DIL provides instances of the use of fé as a noun meaning ‘grief’. These are mostly in variants of the set phrase *ba fé ille 7 ba fé innunn* ‘it was woe on one side and woe on the other side’, referring to casualties in battle.

The status of the form given under 1 fé (a) in DIL is uncertain. According to Cormac’s Glossary, fé was the word for a rod which was used among the pagans to measure bodies for burial.\(^74\) Cormac derives it from Latin *va*ē ‘alas’ (*fé ab eo qued est uae*), but also makes a (rather farfetched) link between this interjection and the rod.\(^75\) He explains that everyone hated to hold this rod in his hand, and that anything that was hateful to anyone was compared to it. From this came the proverbial phrase *fé fris* ‘woe to it’ (*unde in prouerbium uenit fé fris*) as the rod which is called fé is fearful (*amail is n-adēc[h]de in flesc cui nomen fé*). A possible instance of fé in the sense of ‘rod’ is to be found in the poem on Loch Dacháech in the *Metrical Dindshenchas*. In his edition, E. J. Gwynn reads ll. 51–3 as *toirsech bass de, rothoimsech fe, fri cnes ríg˙fer* ‘weary was the palm thereby, with frequent smiting—*alas!* upon the flesh of royal men’.\(^76\) In the Glossary, however, Gwynn emended his reading, in the light of a comment by Kuno Meyer,\(^77\) to *rothoimsed fé fri cnes rígfer* ‘a measuring rod has been measured against the flesh of royal men’.\(^78\) He here follows the reading indicated by a glossed quotation from this poem in H 4. 22 f. 37a (O’C 2018): *ro toimsed fe* (i.e. in tsalt.tomuis) *fri cnes rigfer*. Pokorny derives fé ‘rod’ from *uìi*, containing the root *uei-* ‘to bend’.\(^79\) He compares the Old Irish verbal stem *fe-n* (*ui-ne-), as in *ar-fen* ‘fences out’, *imm-fen* ‘fences around’, *fíthe* ‘fenced, woven’, Welsh *gwialen* ‘rod, stick’.

In the Middle Irish tale *Cath Maige Tuired*, this interjection occurs in the spell (*céta*) chanted by Lug to the men of Ireland before the great battle against the Fomorians: *Fó! Fó! Fé! Fé!*\(^80\) These sounds are clearly intended to have a magical effect on the martial prowess of the men of Ireland.

11. fuit, fuit-fuit, uit.

The instinctive sound which people make when they are suffering from the cold is exceptionally difficult to represent in conventional orthographies,


\(^74\)Meyer, *Sanas Cormaic* 49–50 § 606.

\(^75\)The rod is stated in Cormac’s Glossary to be a *flesc idaith* which is taken in DIL s.v. fé to mean ‘rod of yew’. However, *idaith* is classified in the tree-list in the law-text *Bretha Comaithechsa* as a less valuable tree than *iabar* ‘yew’. In my article, ‘The Old Irish tree-list’ (*Celtica* 11 (1976) 107–24, at 115), I tentatively suggest that *idaith* means ‘wild cherry’ (*Prunus avium*).

\(^76\)E. J. Gwynn, *The Metrical Dindshenchas* iii 186.


\(^79\)IEW i 1120–21.

\(^80\)Elizabeth A. Gray (ed.), *Cath Maige Tuired: the second battle of Mag Tuired* (Irish Texts Society LII, London 1982) 58.592 § 129; cf. 60.634 § 133.
because it consists of variable puffing and blowing noises, sometimes with sustained vibration of the upper lip. The most realistic which I have come across is the Norwegian *huttutu!* which seems much more convincing than the conventional *brrrr!* of English.

Most attestations of the Early Irish interjection *fuit* or *fuit-fuit* occur in the context of cold. Thus a poem in the Middle Irish tale *'Uath Beinne Étaír* starts off with the words *Fuit, fuid! Fuar inocht Mag lethon Luirc* ‘Brrr, brrr! Cold tonight is the broad plain of Lorg’.81 Likewise, a poem in *Buile Suíbhne* contains the stanza:

As fuit, fuit damh ó nach mair
mo chollán i n-eidhsneachb,
feraidh mórd do sónaibh air
agus mórd do thoirneachabh.

‘It is cold, cold to me since my body
does not live in ivied places,
much bad weather comes upon it
and much thunder’.82

An association between *fuit* and cold is also found in glossaries. In Cormac’s Glossary, *fuitt* is explained as *fuacht* ‘cold’,83 and in O’Davoren’s Glossary the word *brat* ‘cloak’ is given the etymological gloss *i.e. good for cold*.84 It is probable that the interjection *uit* is to be taken as a variant of *fuit*. The only attestation is in the marginal entry *uit mo chrob* in Codex Sangallensis 904 p. 176b.85 Stokes and Strachan translate ‘Alas! my hand’. As there is no context, it is uncertain what afflicts the scribe’s hand, but it could well be the cold. What appears to be a different use of the interjection *fuit* is attested in Recension I of the *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, where Fergus recounts the boyhood deeds of Cú Chulainn. He describes how Cú Chulainn met him in the doorway of the fortress when he was severely injured. Evidently shocked by his appearance, Cú Chulainn exclaims ‘Fuit! Dia do bethu, a popa Fergus’.86 In her edition, Cecile O’Rahilly translates ‘Hey! Welcome! master Fergus’ (p. 138) and comments in the Notes that she treats *fuit* here as a ‘blank interjection’ which takes its colour from the context (p. 249). I feel, however, that the translation ‘alas!’ given by Strachan in his *Stories from the Táin* is preferable.87 Cú Chulainn may be regarded as shivering with pity or horror at his fosterfather’s injuries.

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83 Kuno Meyer (ed.), *Sanas Cormaic* 22 § 249 s.v. *culpait*.
85 Whitley Stokes and John Strachan (ed.), *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* ii xxii.8.
12. gib-gab, giba-gapa, gipa-gapa.

Many languages contain contemptuous expressions which purport to represent the sounds made by foreigners. Thus the Greek word \( \beta \dot{a} \rho \dot{a} \dot{a} \rho \rho \varsigma \) (borrowed into Latin as barbarus) ‘foreigner, non-Greek speaker’ is of onomatopoeic origin, and refers to the incomprehensible babbling made by speakers of unfamiliar tongues.\(^{88}\) Though not strictly an interjection, I include here the onomatopoeic gib-gab (v.l. giba-gapa, gipa-gapa), which occurs in the early Middle Irish tale Airec Menman Uraird mac Coisse.\(^{89}\) The text has nirbo gib-gab na gcennaighi ‘it was not the babbling of the merchants’, which doubtless refers to foreign traders conducting their business in languages other than Irish. In Modern Irish giob-geab is used in a jocular sense of ‘chat, gossip’.\(^{90}\)

Kuno Meyer compares gib-gab with the Northern English and Scottish di-alectal form giff-gaff, and takes it to have been introduced into Irish through contact with Northern English traders.\(^{91}\) However, the earliest attestation of the phrase (with the meaning ‘mutual giving, give and take’) is not until 1549, and in the sense of ‘interchange of remarks, promiscuous talk’ it does not appear until 1787.\(^{92}\) The Irish spellings indicate that the form was pronounced with a /b/, which does not tally with the /f/ of giff-gaff. As in the case of gic-goc below, it seems more likely to be a native formation.

13. gic-goc, gig-gog.

The early Middle Irish tale Airec Menman Uraird mac Coisse uses the onomatopoeic gic-goc (v.l. gic-gog) in the phrase nirbu gíc-goc Gallgaidhel ‘it was not the stuttering of the Norse-Irish’.\(^{93}\) This expression may be intended to convey the awkward mixture of languages employed by those of hybrid Norse-Irish race, or it may simply refer to the harshly-accented Irish which they spoke. In his review of Meyer’s Wortkunde, Marstrander suggested that gic-goc (gig-gog) is actually a borrowing from Norse gigga ‘to stagger’ and gogga ‘to mumble’.\(^{94}\) The scenario envisaged is apparently that the Norse-Irish applied the terms gigga and gogga to their halting attempts at speaking Irish, and that this phrase was taken into the language and used by the author of Airec Menman Uraird mac Coisse. One might compare the adoption of the

\(^{88}\) IEW i 91–2 s.v. balbal-.


\(^{90}\) Dinneen, Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla s.v. geab; Ó Dónaill, Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla s.v. giob; Seoirse Mac Clúin, Caint an Chláir i (Baile Átha Cliath 1940) 504 s.v. giob-geab.


\(^{92}\) OED s.v. giff-gaff.

\(^{93}\) Byrne, ‘Airec Menman Uraird mac Coisse’ 72.6 § 29.

Irish word *barróg* ‘speech-impediment, lisp’\(^{95}\) into English as *brogue* ‘a pronounced Irish accent’.\(^{96}\) On the other hand, there is the difficulty that Norse *gigga* refers to clumsy movement rather than speech, and there seems no reason for the Norse-Irish to have walked as well as talked in an awkward manner. Furthermore, the expression *gic-goc* (*gig-gog*) is similar to a number of onomatopoeic words or phrases in the later language referring to various squeaking, faint or silly sounds, whether made by humans or animals, e.g. *giog* ‘squeak, chirp’, *giog* ‘a very slight sound’, *gioglach* ‘squealing (of mice)’, *giog guag* ‘a silly prater’, *gioc-bioc!* ‘peep-bo!’ \(^{97}\) It seems to me, therefore, that Middle Irish *gic-goc* is more likely to be a native expression than a Norse loan.

14. *gó*.

See under *bú* above.

15. *ha*.

In his recent edition of the Irish glosses in Boethius’s *Consolatio Philosophiae*, Pádraig Ó Néill notes the occurrence in gloss 9 of the interjection *ha* ‘indeed’.\(^{98}\) He takes it to be an Irish word rather than the Latin interjection *ha* of joy or derision, which would not suit the context. His view is supported by the fact that the previous gloss 8a, *uch*, is also an interjection, and undoubtedly Irish. As in the case of *ahé* and *hé-hé*, it is probable that the *h* was actually pronounced: /ha/ or /ha:/.

The only example of this interjection noted in *DIL* s.v. *há* is as a variant in the Irish version of the Old French *chanson de geste*, *Fierabras*. The Laud 610 version has *ha há a crisraigh*,\(^{99}\) corresponding to *o a crisraide* ‘O Christian’ of the Egerton 1781 version and *a a a crisraide* of the H 2. 7 version.\(^{100}\) The context indicates a hailing or challenging interjection.

16. *hé-hé*.

The instinctive double interjection expressing joy or amusement is represented in very similar forms in languages throughout the world, e.g. English *ha-ha!* , *hee-hee!* , Latin *ha-hae!* , *he-hae!* , Sanskrit *hī-hī*. The interjection *he-he* is attested once in Old Irish, in the Palatine ms 68 Glosses on the Psalms.\(^{101}\) The Latin text has *euge euge* ‘rejoice, rejoice’, which is glossed *he he sirson sirson* ‘ha-ha! happy! happy!’.

As in the case of *ahé* and *ha*, it is likely that the *h* would have been pronounced in this interjection: /he: he:/ *DIL* s.v. *he* takes *hé hé* in the

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\(^{96}\)OED s.v. *brogue*.

\(^{97}\)Dinneen, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* s.vv.; Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* s.vv.


\(^{100}\)Stokes does not give this reading, which is found in the Trinity College Dublin ms H 2. 7 (no. 1298) p. 442.

\(^{101}\)Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* i 3.16.
seventeenth-century text *Pairliament Chloinne Tomáis* to be an English loan-word,\(^{102}\) but the Palatine ms 68 gloss shows it to have been present in the earlier language.

17. *ia.*

The interjection *ia* seems to be employed to express defiance in the Middle Irish tale (mainly in verse) beginning *A bairgen atai i nígábud* ‘O loaf, thou art in danger’.\(^{103}\) An obstreperous servant of the King of Munster demanded a second loaf of bread from an old woman of Leinster who was baking for the ploughmen. She refused his request on the grounds that the loaf was protected by the King of Leinster: ‘*Ia ón ómm*, *ar in chaillech, *ro gab a comnairgi fort in bairgen so; úair atá for commairge ríg Lagen*’ ‘Oh! indeed,’ said the old woman, “This loaf has got its protection against thee, as it is under the protection of the King of Leinster.” This is the only attestation of *ia* as an interjection given in *DIL*.\(^{104}\) For the interjection *óm(m)*: see no. 20 below.

18. *mem(m).*

It is likely that there was an onomatopeic interjection in Old Irish representing the sound of a kiss, sometimes spelled as *mwah!* in English. No such interjection is attested in the surviving Early Irish texts, but the derivative neuter noun *mem* occurs in the phrase *mem n-áise* ‘a willing kiss’ in a law-text on offences within marriage.\(^{105}\) According to this passage, if a wife willingly kisses a man other than her husband, she must pay him half the bride-price and half his honour-price (*lethcòibhch* 7 *lethenecclann uaithi*). This word is also attested in glossaries with the meaning *.i. póc* ‘i.e. kiss’.\(^{106}\)


The regular sound which a cat makes is represented in various languages by similar spellings, e.g. English *meow*, etc. A fragment from the lost Old Irish law-text *Cat˙slechta* refers to a kitchen cat by the name of *Méone*, i.e. ‘little meow’.\(^{107}\) In O’Davoren’s Glossary, we find the spelling *Meoine*, which is explained *.i. ainm cait . . . .i. miu ina inde no meoan ina inde .i. meghel ina inde* ‘i.e. the name of a cat . . . i.e. “meow” in its essence, or mewing in its essence or bleating in its essence’.\(^{108}\) The fem. noun *m¯eigel*, *m¯eidel* (with derivatives *m¯eid*[h]*lech*, *m¯eig*[h]*lech*, *m¯eigellach*) is well attested of the sound made by cats, goats or sheep. The initial *m¯e-* is clearly of onomatopeic origin.\(^{109}\)

\(^{102}\) N. J. A. Williams (ed.), *Pairlement Chloinne Tomáis* (Dublin 1981) 34.1053.

\(^{103}\) T. P. Nowlan, ‘The quarrel about the loaf’, *Ériu* 1 (1904) 134 = LL i 225.6690.

\(^{104}\) *DIL* s.v. *ia*.

\(^{105}\) D. A. Binchy (ed.), *Corpus iuris hibernici* (hereafter *CIH*) (Dublin 1978) i 146.5.

\(^{106}\) See *DIL* s.v. *mem(m)*; *LEIA: lettres MNOP* (M-34) s.v. *mem(m)*.

\(^{107}\) *CIH* i 110.18.


\(^{109}\) *LEIA: lettres MNOP* M-28 s.v. *meigel*. 
20. om(m), óm.

Interjections with *m* have a wide variety of functions in language. In English *mmm* (also written *yum*) indicates relish on the consumption or anticipation of food. A similar sound, but with a different intonation, expresses agreement and may also be written *mmm*. Another *m*-interjection serves as a meaningless filler between phrases, and is typical of a halting style of speaking, as in English *um*.110

In Old Irish *om(m)* is well attested in the sagas—particularly in the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*—as a filler or affirmative in reported speech, and can be translated ‘indeed, truly’. For example, the Book of Leinster version of the *Táin* quotes King Ailill as saying to his wife Medb: *Is math ben ben dagfir* ‘happy is the woman who is the wife of a good man’, to which she replies: *Maith om* ‘she is indeed’.111 It may be used in combination with other interjections or particles. In Recension I of the same tale, an unnamed warrior responds to Cú Chulainn’s request to stay with the words *Nád anéb om ale* ‘Indeed I shall not stay’.112 Here *om* and *ale* (see under *alla*, etc. above) are combined for emphasis. In one version of the tale *Feis Tige Becfoltaig* a wife greets her husband with the words *Fochen om eim* ‘welcome indeed’.113 In this case the interjection *om* is combined with *éim*, classed in *DIL* as ‘a particle of asseveration or a confirmation’, and treated as a by-form of *ám*.114

This interjection is sometimes spelled *óm(m)*, and *LEIA* suggests that this is a variant caused by confusion with the long vowel of the particle *ám*.115 However, I suggest that the use of the accent here indicates the long drawn-out nature of the *m*-sound rather than an actual lengthened vowel.

21. sist, ist, sit, sit-sit.

*Triads of Ireland* no. 137 reads *Trí bráithir úamain: ist!, sta! coiste!* ‘three brothers of fear: hist! hush! listen!’116 The third element in this triad, *coiste*, is 2sg. imperative of *con-túaisi* ‘is silent, listens’. The first and second elements are onomatopoic interjections. In the Book of Lecan version, the third element is omitted, giving a duad *Dá bráthair omain: ist!, sta!*117

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110 *OED* s.v. *um*.
114 *DIL* s.vv. *ém*, *ám*; *LEIA*: lettre A (A-64) s.v. *ám*.
115 *LEIA*: lettres MNOP (O-22) s.v. *omm* ‘sans doute par confusion avec *ám*, *ám*’.
116 Kuno Meyer (ed.), *The Triads of Ireland* (Todd Lecture Series XIII, Dublin 1906) 18 § 137. I have altered Meyer’s translation slightly, and placed the three elements in the order in which they appear in the majority of the MSS.
117 Nine leaves of the Book of Lecan (including its version of the *Triads of Ireland*) are now bound with the Trinity College Dublin ms H 2. 17 (no. 1319). See E. J. Gwynn and T. K. Abbott, *Catalogue of the Irish manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin* (Dublin 1921) 113.
This interjection is found in a variety of spellings. In the ten mss of this triad, five have *ist*, three have *sist*, and two have *sit*. There are also occurrences of the doubling of this interjection. In the Rawlinson B 502 version of the Story of the Death of Máelodrán, we find the phrase *Ata ina chotlud. Sit-sit, arnachandusca* ‘He (Máelodrán) is asleep. Hush lest thou wake him’.

It is also attested in O’Clery’s Glossary, where it is glossed *éisd, éisd* ‘listen, listen’. The single form of this interjection is given in Ó Dónaill’s *Foclóir* under the headword *sist*, with a variant *sit*. His translation is ‘psht!’. Compton Mackenzie must have heard the double interjection *ist-ist* in the Gaelic of Barra, as he uses it in his comic novel *Whisky galore*. In his Glossary he provides the pronunciation ‘isht, isht’, and explains it as equivalent to English ‘hush, hush’.

Similar spellings of this interjection are widespread in language, e.g. Welsh *ust*, Latin *st*, Russian *st’, English (archaic and dialect) *hist, whist, whisht*. The noun *sist* (also *sist*) ‘respite, period of time, delay’ may possibly derive from this onomatopeic interjection; one can compare the use of English *hush* as a noun meaning ‘stillness’. As we have seen, words of onomatopeic origin tend to be variable: this may account for the variation in the length of the *i* in this noun.

Mention should also be made here of the onomatopeic formation *sit-sait* (*sidsad* v.l.), which is attested only in the Middle Irish prose tale *Bórama*. It is used in the context of the sound of a host of men and animals approaching in the dark: *Co cualatar Airgialla sitsait 7 broscur in mórluag 7 rámtean na grega, 7 tenmedach na damraide fana fenaib*. Stokes translates: ‘until the men of Oriel heard the din(?) and noise of the mighty host, and the snorting (?) of the oxen under their wagons’. In this vivid passage, the author is clearly trying to convey something of the variety of sounds made by an advancing host, accentuated by the darkness. I would guess that he used *sit-sait* to express the rustling or swishing sounds made by the warriors’ garments.

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118 Kuno Meyer (ed.), *Hibernica Minora, being a fragment of an Old-Irish Treatise on the Psalter*, with translation, notes and glossary, and an appendix (Anecdota Oxoniensia, Oxford 1894) 78.23 (trans. p. 80); David Greene (ed.), *Fingal Rónain and other stories* (Dublin 1955, repr. 1993) 52.996.


120 Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* s.v. *sist*.


122 No etymology is proposed in *LEIA*: lettres RS (S-120) s.v. *sist*.

123 Whitley Stokes (ed.), ‘The *Boroma*, *Revue celtique* 13 (1892) 88 § 106 = LL v 1299.38683. In LL there is a letter before *sitsait* which is rubbed and difficult to read. In his Facsimile Joseph O’Longan transcribed it as ‘*thsitsait*’ (Robert Atkinson (ed.), *The Book of Leinster* . . . now for the first time published from the original manuscript in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, by the Royal Irish Academy (Dublin 1880) p. 304a44). Another possibility would be to take the rubbed letter to be an *i* with an *n*-stroke over it, and read ‘*in sitsait*’. This would agree with ‘*in sidsad*’ of the Book of Lecan version (Kathleen Mulchrone (ed.), *The Book of Lecan: Leabhar Mór Mhic Fhir Bhisigh Leacain* (Facsimiles in collotype of Irish manuscripts II, Dublin 1937) f. 307vb25 = p. 614b25).
22. sta, sda, ta, sta-ta, tath, taith.

Even though they appear as separate items in Triad 137, there seems to have been little distinction in meaning between this and the previous interjection. This is demonstrated by the fact that the Rawlinson B 512 version of the Story of the Death of Máelodrán has *Sta-ta! nachandíusaig* ‘hush! lest thou wake him’,124 where Rawlinson B 502 has *Sit-sit, arnachandusca* (see previous entry). This interjection may be spelled with or without an initial s-. Thus, the Yellow Book of Lecan version of Cormac’s Glossary has *sta! a c[h]aillech, na acaille Senchán* ‘hush! o hag, do not speak to Senchán’.125 In the Bodleian version of this glossary, on the other hand, this interjection is spelled *tá*.126 In *Togail Bruidne Dá Derga* there are three instances of the expression *tá chéin* ‘hush for a while’,127 which occurs in *Togail Bruidne Dá Choca* in the spelling *tath chéin*.128 The spelling *taith cein* is attested in an H 3. 18 glossary, where it is explained *i. cloistigti ‘i.e. listen ye’.129 It is probable that the -th here was still pronounced [h] at this period.

Following Strachan130 and Loth,131 Vendryes takes *tá* to be cognate with *toaid* ‘is silent’, and states ‘il s’agirait de l’adj. *tauso-* en emploi imperatif (comme gall. *taw!*), doublet de *töe* (v. à part). Mais le vocalisme fait difficulté: on attendrait *táu* > *tó*.132 However, I would argue that *sta, ta* do not have an etymological origin and belong to the world-wide category of instinctive interjections conveying the warning: ‘be quiet’.

23. ub, upp, abb-abb-abb.

In the St. Gall Glosses,133 the Latin interjection of grief *ei* is glossed *i. interiectio .i. upp*, which I take to be a variant spelling of *ub*.134 This interjection can be compared with Med. Welsh *ub, wb, wb-wb* ‘alas’, which gives rise to *ubain* ‘to sob, moan, howl’.135 In his article ‘The Irish war-cry’, David Greene points out that both Irish and Welsh have interjections of grief with -b (Irish *upp, ub*; Welsh *ub, wb*) and -ch (Irish *uch, och*; Welsh *och*). He suggests mutual borrowing, i.e. Welsh *och* from Irish, and Irish *ub* from Welsh.136 However, it seems to me that both these interjections are so widely attested in language that it is unnecessary to postulate borrowing.

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129 *CH* iii 950.12.
131 J. Loth, ‘Notes étymologiques et lexicographiques, no. 34’, *Revue celtique* 32 (1911) 199.
132 LEIA: *lettres TU* (T-2) s.v. tá.
133 Stokes and Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus* ii 147.28.
134 Other instances of *pp* for *bh* include *app* for *ab*, *appaidh* for *abaid*.
I would compare the Old Irish *ub* of grief with the *hobou* referred to by the English historian Fynes Moryson, writing in the early seventeenth century. He remarks of the Irish in his *The manners and customs of Ireland*: ‘They are by nature very clamorous, upon every small occasion raising the *hobou* (that is a doleful outcry), which they take one from another’s mouth till they put the whole town in tumult’. This ‘doleful outcry’ is doubtless the same sound as that rendered by Derricke as *bohhowe* in his *Image of Irelande*. The accompanying illustration shows Irish warriors being put to flight.

There is often overlap between interjections of grief (*boo-hoo!*) and cries of disapproval, defiance or aggression (*boo!*), cf. *uch* below. In the tenth-century comic tale *Aisling Meic Conglinne*, the anti-hero Mac Conglinne uses the interjection *abb-abb-abh* where, in the view of both editors of this text, the context suggests defiance. I would link his cry, which is uttered at the top of his voice (*a n-uachtar a chind*), with the various onomatopoeic formations in *-b*- expressing aggression. Some of these occur in the writings of English authors when describing the cries of Irish warriors. In his *Faerie Queene* (1590), Edmund Spenser links them with the war-pipes: ‘They heard a noyse of many bagpipes shrill and shrieking *hububs* them approaching nere . . .’. He uses a similar form in his *View of the present state of Ireland* (1596) in an explicitly military context: ‘they come running with a terrible yell and *hubbabowe*, as yf heaven and earth would have gone together, which is the very image of the Irish *hubbabow[e]*, which theyr *kerne* [= *ceithearn* ‘warband’] use at theyr first encounter’. *OED* s.v. *hubbub* provides many instances from sources of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries where such forms are associated with belligerent Irish or Welsh crowds. In an attestation of 1555, the noise made by African tribesmen going drinking is compared with an *yrishe *whobub*, and in 1586 J. Hooker defines the *hubbub* as a ‘hue and crie’ according to the custom of Ireland. In seventeenth-century Welsh contexts *hubbub* is used of the rallying-cry for the assembly of able-bodied men. The *Mercurius Civicus* of 1645 refers to a *hubbub* being raised in Glamorgan with the result that five thousand men were gathered together by the next morning. The threatening nature of a Welsh *hubbub* is also clear from the *New Letanie*, published in 1646, which asks for deliverance from ‘Irish Rebells and Welsh *hubbub*-men, from Independents and their Tubmen’. Another variant (*OED* s.v. *hubbuboo*)

137 C. Litton Falkiner (ed.), *Illustrations of Irish history and topography, mainly of the seventeenth century* (London 1904) 312.
138 John Small (ed.), *The image of Irelande with a discoverie of woodcarne* by John Derricke, 1581, p. 67.
141 Morris, ibid. 632.
is quoted from eighteenth-century Scotland: ‘every now and then [they] break out into a hideous Howl or Ho-bo-bo-boo’.

Greene considers various etymological explanations of the Irish war-cry abó!, abú. It is first attested from the Calendar of Justiciary Rolls of the early fourteenth century, which records that a group of men were charged with frightening the inhabitants of a village in Co. Kildare with the words Fennock-abo, the rallying cry of the O’Tooles. An enactment of Poyning’s parliament of 1495 outlawed the use of such cries as Butler-abo and Crom-abo. This demonstrates that these martial cries with -abo were prevalent among the gaelicized Normans of Ireland, as well as the native septs. In his View of the present state of Ireland, Spenser took these cries to be of Irish origin, referring to the famous O’Neill cry of Landargabowe (Lámh dhearg abó) ‘up the Red Hand’. He concludes ‘and to theyr ensample, the old English also which there remayneth have gotten up theyr cries Scythian-like, as the Geraldins Croum-abowe and the Butlers Butleaur-abowe’.

Greene rejects as untenable the explanation given in Dinneen’s Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla that abú derives from go buaidh ‘to victory’, on the grounds that the preposition go never loses its initial consonant in anglicised forms. He likewise points out the semantic and phonological difficulties in interpreting it as a borrowing from French à bout ‘to the end’. This French phrase is not used in this sense, and the final -t would be expected to survive in Irish as -d. The explanation which Greene favours is that proposed by Lord Justice Pelham in a letter to Queen Elizabeth I written on 28 December 1597. He justifies his decision to outlaw the Earl of Desmond on the grounds that he ‘in all his skirmishes and outrages since the proclamation crieth Papa abo, which is the Pope above, even above you and your Imperial crown’. Greene points out that ‘up’ and ‘high’ are regular formants in partisan cries in many languages, e.g. ‘Up Mayo’, Hoch der Kaiser!, Arriba España!, etc. He suggests that abo is an apocopated form of Middle English abofe ‘above’, and compares the Dutch rallying cry Orange boven! ‘Orange above, on top’. While the semantics of Greene’s case cannot be faulted, I believe that an onomatopeic origin for abó is more likely, and that the regular spelling became fixed by convention from a wide range of martial boohing noises.

24. uch, uch-uch, och, ach.

Pain or grief elicits various noises involving exhalation and velar friction. These are obviously impossible to represent with any degree of accuracy in conventional orthographies. Early Irish uses uch, och, or—less commonly—ach. The variation in the initial vowel presumably reflects different tongue

143 Fennock is for Irish féannóg, fionnóg ‘scald-crow’, the emblem of the O’Tooles.
144 Crom-abo refers to Crom Castle, the seat of the Fitzgeralds.
146 In O’Mulconry’s Glossary ach is associated with physical pain: i. interiecht galair ‘i.e. an interjection of sickness’ (Stokes, ‘O’Mulconry’s Glossary’ no. 82 (in Stokes and Meyer, Archiv für celtische Lexikographie i 238)).
and lip positions during the production of these sounds. Interjections of this type are widespread in language, e.g. Welsh och, Breton ach, German ach. In the English of Scotland and Ulster, the ubiquitous och has been weakened to express mild surprise, disapproval or uncertainty.

As well as being used as an interjection expressing pain or grief, uch in Early Irish has been put into service as a masculine *u*-stem noun in the sense of ‘sigh, groan, lamentation’ with a gen. sg. *uchta*. There is also a considerable number of derivatives with various suffixes. The archaic poem *Amra Choluimb Chille* contains the form *uchtat* ‘small groan’ with the diminutive suffix -(h)at. With other suffixes, *uch* etc. forms nouns with the general meaning ‘sigh, lamentation, complaint’, e.g. *uchadaid, ochadaid; uchán, ochán, acháin; uchbad, ochbad (ochfadh); ochnad (oxad); uchlán, ochlán, achlán*. It is most probable that Welsh ochain ‘to groan’ (and the further derivatives ochenaid, uchenaid ‘sigh, groan’) similarly derives from onomatopoeic *och*.

The interjections *uchán, ochón, uchacán*, etc. likewise derive from *uch*. They belong particularly to the ritual of keening for the dead. The Early Modern Irish lament attributed to Gormlaith contains the interjections *uchagán* (five times), *uch* and *ach*. Such forms are also employed in religious verse, as in the Middle Irish poem beginning *Uch, a Dé! uch aniu is uch ané ‘Alas, o God! alas today and alas yesterday*. It contains the forms *uchán* (§§ 2, 3, 5, 6) and *uchacán* (§ 3).

We have seen above that interjections in the *ub* group are used both to represent grief, and as war-cries. We find the same cross-over in the *uch* group. Triad 112 gives one of ‘the three speeches which are better than silence’ as *uchán ríg do chath*, which Meyer translates as ‘inciting a king to battle’.

A gloss (not quoted by Meyer) in the eighteenth-century manuscript H 1. 15 provides the explanation *i. och mor do chur as ag brostughadh catha* ‘i.e. he

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147 DIL s.v. 1 *uch* II.
makes a great *och!* inciting to battle*. Another example of a derivative of *och!* used in a martial context is to be found in the Annals of Connacht. Here the annalist describes how the son of the king of Connacht led his army into the attack, uttering his high king’s cry and his warrior’s shout (*ro leicc a ochainn ardrig as 7 a grech curad*). The form *ochann* here can hardly be other than a derivative of *och!*

Finally, I have not noted any occurrences in Old or Middle Irish texts of the interjections *á* ‘ah!’ and *ó* ‘oh!’, though they are well-attested in Modern Irish. The interjection *á* has a wide variety of applications in language. Pokorny lists various ranges of meaning associated with this interjection in the Indo-European languages, including pain, astonishment, grief, anger, mockery and scorn (*IEW* i 1). Like *e* (*IEW* i 281) and *ū* (*IEW* i 772), *á* serves also as a hailing interjection. In the Celtic languages this has developed into the vocative particle *a*. In Old Irish this leniting particle is obligatory, except in some instances before *mo* ‘my’. In the mss it is sometimes spelled *ď*, but this seems to be a graphic convention rather than an indication of length. In Medieval Welsh the vocative particle *a* is optional. In Middle Breton the vocative particle *a* is attested, but it was replaced in Early Modern Breton by *o*, which Hemon regards as having been borrowed from French. One can compare the situation in Irish where the use of *ó* as a hailing interjection postdates the Anglo-Norman invasion, and may be an introduction. As we have seen under *ha* above, it is combined with the vocative particle *a* in the variant reading *o a christaide* (= *ó a christaide*) ‘o Christian’.

*Fergus Kelly*

*Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies*

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155 Trinity College Dublin ms H 1. 15 (no. 1289) p. 949.
158 LEIA: lettre A (A-3) s.v. *á*, *a*.
159 Thurneysen, *Grammar of Old Irish* 156 § 248; *DIL*, s.v. 1 a.
162 Hemon, *Historical morphology and syntax of Breton* 141 § 87.