OLD IRISH TAIR ‘COME!’

By Jay H. Jasanoj

The formation of the imperfect in Old Irish is that of a fairly typical IE language. In the 2 sg., active the overwhelming majority of the attested forms consist historically of a bare present stem with no overt desinence, as can be seen from examples like mór (< *-dā) beside 3 sg. indic. móraid, móra ‘magnifies’ (< *-dāī; class A I); léic (< *-i) beside léicid, léici ‘leaves’ (< *-īt; class A II); beir (< *-e) beside beirid, beir ‘carries’ (< *-ēt; class B I); gaib (< *-i) beside gaibid, gaib ‘takes’ (< *-īt; class B II); and ben (< *-a) beside bénaid, bén ‘strikes’ (< *-āt; class B IV). In each of these forms the Old Irish final syllable, which regularly eliminates unstressed final vowels and -VC sequences, have led to the loss of the original stem vowel. A trace of this element, however, is preserved in the palatality or non-palatality of the preceding consonant, which is itself preserved.

Thurneysen, GOI §588, lists six irregular 2 sg. imperatives which show a more extreme kind of reduction. All are made from verbs which form s-subjectives, and all are characterized by a radical truncation of the root syllable precisely similar to that found in the s-subjective 3 sg. conjunct:

tair ‘come!’ (< *to-ar(e)-ink-)1
no-main ‘spare me!’ (< *aneg-)
tog ‘choose!’ (< *to-gess-)
aic(c) ‘invoke as surety!’ (< *ad-gēd-)
at-rē, com-ēi-r ‘arise!’ (< *kom-jess-reg-)
*foir (Mir. *fōir) ‘help!’ (< *wo-reit-)

The resemblance of these forms to s-subjectives is not usually taken to be accidental. According to a theory originally proposed by H. Zimmer, KZ 30, 118 f. (1890), the tair-imperatives, as we shall call them, continue 2 sg. s-aorist injunctives of the type *ink-s-s, *aneg-s-s, *reg-s-s, etc.;2 they can thus be regarded as the second person counterparts of the forms in *s-s-t that according to the usual view underlie the 3 sg. s-subjectives of the same verbs (cf. subj. tair(i) < *to-ar(e)-ink-s-t, ain < *aneg-s-t, chomot < *reg-s-t, etc.). From a functional point of view the use of the injunctive in an imperative sense can be compared with the occasional substitution of aorist injunctive forms for imperatives in Vedic Sanskrit and Avestan. With minor modifications this analysis of the tair-imperatives is accepted by Lewis-Pedersen (CCCC, 286), Thurneysen (loc. cit.), Watkins (Celt. Vb., 139) and Meid (Grundlagen, 123); it may fairly be described as the standard theory.

There are several reasons, however, why the proposed derivation of forms like tair from injunctives in *s-s-t must be viewed with scepticism. There can be no reasonable doubt that *s-s-t was the ending of the 2 sg. s-aorist in dialectal Indo-European, but it is quite a different matter to assume that actual injunctives of the type *ink-s-s were still available for use as imperatives in early Celtic times. None of the above verbs has an s-preterite, the only one of Old Irish sigmatic formations that can be traced with reasonable certainty to the indicative/injunctive of the PIE s-aorist.3 Whether the subjunctives *iss-, *aness-, *gōss-, *gess-, *ress- (< *reg-s-) and *ress- (< *ret-s-) provide reliable evidence for the late survival of the injunctive is doubtful. The inflection of the s-subjective is essentially identical with that of the s-future and s-preterite, all three categories being synchronically characterized by a mixture of thematic and athematic endings.4 Since this uniformity is almost surely secondary, the athematic structure of subjunctive forms like tair(i), ain, etc. can as easily be due to morphological leveling as to inheritance from Proto-Indo-European. If genuinely old, the existence of a 3 sg. modal ending *s-s-t in Common Celtic would certainly lend support to the assumption of a parallel 2 sg. in *s-s-t. But it is at least as likely that the s-subjective continues a true ‘short-vowel’ subjunctive of the type seen in Ved. 3 sg. dārsat (dr-‘split’) or Gk. 1 pl. erōsomen (erīō ‘I drag’), and that the *ink-s-s which underlies tair(i) arose through analogical contamination with the 3 sg. of the s-future or s-preterite.5 The latter analysis would account for the modal value
of the s-subjunctive without requiring us to assume the survival of the PIE injunctive as a Celtic category. It would also, of course, deprive the ‘injunctive’ theory of the tair-imperatives of any independent raison d’être.

Nor is it clear why, even if Celtic had inherited 2 sg. injunctives of the required type, it would have utilized them as surrogates for the ordinary imperatives *inki, *anege, etc. It is true, as we have already noted, that aorist injunctives are sometimes employed in a hortative function in Indo-Iranian; this usage is regular in Vedic for dā- ‘give’, chā- ‘put’ and a few other roots that lack normal aorist imperatives. But apart from special cases like these, hortative injunctives are distinctly uncommon in the Vedic corpus, and only a single example of an s-aorist of this type is actually quoted (yād ‘sacrifice!’, RV 10.6.21). Nowhere else in Celtic have ordinary imperatives been supplanted by injunctives, much less by structurally opaque sigmatic forms in which the personal ending has coalesced with the tense sign. With the doubtful exception of a few example to be discussed below, the only known source of imperatives in Old Irish is the present imperative of Proto-Indo-European.

The difficulties of assuming a semantic development injunctive > imperative were noted in 1970 by W. Cowgill, who offered an altogether different explanation of the tair-type (Cardona et al., eds., Indo-European and Indo-Europeans, 123). Citing the familiar example of Latin dic ‘say!’, dūc ‘lead!’ and fac ‘do!’ (for earlier dice, dūce, face), Cowgill proposed to derive at-rēd and aic(c) from *reg and *ged, irregularly apocopated forms of the inherited imperatives *rege (like aig ‘drive!’ < *age) and *gēdi (like gāib ‘take!’ < *gabi). This suggestion, attractive in its simplicity, has certain advantages over the injunctive theory. From a typological point of view, the inherently peremptory character of the 2 sg. imperative renders it peculiarly susceptible to shortening: for parallels to Lat. dic, etc., one need look no further afield than colloquial English gimme or c’mere. Five of the six Irish verbs with tair-imperatives belong to classes B I and B II, and hence would have inherited imperatives in *-e or *-i – precisely the two vowels that can be shown to have been subject to early apocope in other Irish forms. The one exception is do-gou ‘chooses’, from which one might have expected a more resistant imperative in *-d. Here, however, it is conceivable that the A I inflection of this verb is secondary, and that the attested *tōg rests on the apocopated imperative of a thematic present cognate with Ved. jujāte ‘enjoys’.

Nevertheless, the ‘apocope’ theory will not stand scrutiny. In a more recent publication (Rix, ed., Flexion und Wortbildung, 40–70) Cowgill has himself shown that the early loss of *-i was a quasi-regular rule of Insular Celtic, and that, in particular, such third person conjunct forms as OIr. -beir ‘carries’, pl. -beret rest on apocopated preforms *beret and *beront, with the PIE primary endings. This finding might at first glance appear to strengthen the case for apocope in the tair-imperatives, inasmuch as it provides independent evidence for assuming the loss of *-i in the B I imperatives *-ged < *gēdi and ink < *inki.9 The latter form, however, is in reality a serious embarrassment for the apocope theory: the fact that the 3 pl. in *-ont yields -at (via *-odd) rather than disappearing suggests that the phonologically similar sequence *-ink’ (> *-igg) would have resisted complete truncation as well, leaving *tarec as the regular reflex of *-ar(e)-ink’.

A more general weakness of Cowgill’s analysis is that it fails to explain why the attested tair-imperatives are built exclusively to verbs with s-subjunctives. The probability that the association of the two formations is due entirely to chance is not vanishingly small, but it is low – on the order of one in eight, according to an informal calculation.10 As a last resort, one might seek to account for this distribution phonologically: since the s-subjunctive is wholly confined to roots ending in etymological *-g, *-k, *-d, *-t, and *-s, it is at least thinkable that the restriction of the tair-type to such roots reflects nothing more than the failure of Cowgill’s apocope rule to operate after consonants other than dental and velar obstruents. This would ‘explain’ the survival of, e.g., *gabi (> gāib ‘take!’), cf. Gaul. gāb (??) and *bere (> beir ‘carry!’) beside *reg and ged;11 on the other hand, there is no independent evidence for so peculiar and ad hoc a phonological restriction, which would seem to be contradicted by cases like MW fy (nasalizing) ‘my’ < *mem (for *mene) and OIr. pret. 3 sg. -bu, -bo, MW bu ‘was’ < *bow (for *bwe).
It is clear that an ideal account of the tair-imperatives would combine the merits of Zimmer’s and Cowgill’s theories, deriving tair and its congeners directly from imperatives with Cowgill, while explicitly reating them to s-subjectives with Zimmer. Such an explanation is in fact available. Zimmer’s derivation of tair from an injunctive *ink-s-s, rather than, e.g., from an ordinary subjunctive in *ses or *sesi, was based in part on his assumption that a preform of the structure *ink-s + syllable would have yielded *is or *issi under the regular Old Irish final syllable rules. We now know that, strictly speaking, this assumption was incorrect. Cowgill’s theory of the absolute and conjunct endings makes it necessary to postulate a pre-Irish loss of a final -i so early that it escaped detection by the normal Auslautgesetze: the 3 sg. conjunct -beir continues not the injunctive *beret, but the present *bereti. I would now like to suggest the possibility that, in exactly the same fashion, tair goes back not to *ink-s-s (i.e., [inks]), but to disyllabic *ink-si. The structure and meaning of *ink-si make it an obvious candidate for comparison with the Vedic imperative type seen in vakṣi ‘convey!’ (: vahi-), yākṣi ‘sacrifice!’ (: yai-), sātī ‘sit!’ (: sad-) and about twenty other examples. The historical status of these forms, which are largely confined to the Rigveda, is somewhat controversial: the final element -si has been variously identified with the ending of the s-stem locative singular, the 2 sg. of the present indicative and, by haplography, the 2 sg. of the s-aorist subjunctive. Fortunately, the early prehistory of the Vedic si-imperatives is of no immediate relevance to the present discussion; for modern views on the question the reader is referred to the excellent studies of Cardona (Lg. 41, 1-18 (1965)) and Szemerényi (Lg. 42, 1-6 (1966)).

Distinct from the problem of the ultimate origin of the si-imperatives is the question of their structural position within the verbal system of Vedic Sanskrit. On this point we are better informed. It is clear that, at least from a descriptive point of view, the -s- of -si is inseparable from the -s- of the s-aorist, and that, more particularly, the occurrence of si-imperatives is closely correlated with the appearance of s-aorist subjunctives in -sa- (cf. also Narten, *Die sigmatischen Aoriste im Veda*, 45 ff.). A number of roots with imperatives in -s- have well-established sigmatic subjunctives in the Rigveda, but either show many fewer s-aorist indicatives or lack them entirely. Thus, the root vah- underlies 25 instances of the imperative vakṣi and 21 of the subjunctive (3 sg. vakṣat, etc.; cf. YAv. vaṣat), but only one of the indicative (3 sg. avāt); nī ‘lead’ furnishes ten instances of the imperative nēṣi and seven of the subjunctive (nēṣat, etc.), but only one each of the indicative (3 pl. mid. anēṣata) and injunctive (2 pl. naṁṣta); pr- ‘transport’ gives sixteen instances of the imperative pārsi and 21 of the subjunctive (pārṣat, etc.), but the indicative is entirely wanting. Whatever the historical interpretation of this distribution, it is a primary synchronic datum which no comparative study can ignore.

The absence of any generally recognized cognates of the si-imperatives outside Indo-Iranian (cf. however GAv. dōṇiṇi ‘show’ Y. 13. 13) has prevented the development of a consensus as to their antiquity. But the type is clearly archaic within Vedic and could, in principle, easily represent an inheritance from Proto-Indo-European. Positive proof that this is so, in my view, is to be found precisely in the fact that such forms – specifically, *ink-si, aneg-si, geus-si, gved-si, reg-si and ret-si – provide the most natural point of departure for the explanation of Olr. tair, nōm-si, tōg, acce, at-re and comér, and *foir. The structural and functional position of the Irish and Vedic categories are not merely similar; they are virtually identical. Both are active 2 sg. imperatives; both are distributionally associated with sigmatic subjunctives; both are residual within their respective traditions. These agreements are underscored, moreover, by a notable lexical overlap between the two formations.

Three of the six Irish verbs with tair-imperatives are made from roots (*aneg-, *gved-, *ret-) which have no verbal cognates in Vedic; of the three others, *reg- lacks an aorist system altogether and is represented only by the petrified present stems rījā-, rījā- and irajā- ‘lead straight, direct’. This leaves only *geus- and *ink-, both of which, remarkably enough, correspond to Vedic verbs with imperatives in -si and s-aorist subjunctives in -sa-. For *geus-, Ved. jus-, the Rigveda attests the imperative jōṣi (2x) ‘enjoy!’ and the subjunctive 3 sg. jōṣati (3x). The antiquity of these forms has been doubted: Narten (p. 120) inclines to see jōṣat, which is found
only in the late first and tenth books, as a secondary creation to jōst, while Carthona (pp. 13–14) takes jōsat as primary and jōst as the analogical form. The caution of these scholars, however, is based on an assumption that the Old Irish evidence itself tends to falsify, namely, that a well-developed s-aorist subjunctive and s-imperative are unlikely both to be old unless supported by an inherited s-aorist indicative. As I shall show elsewhere, there is in fact considerable reason to believe that the subjunctive of the sigmatic aorist—and with it probably the imperative in -si as well—was at least partly independent of the corresponding indicative in late PIE times. In the present case it can hardly be doubted that both forms are ancient: jōst is exactly equatable with OIr. tog (< *tōgoś, with the same secondary shortening from *tōgoś as in 3 sg. subj. -t < *tēss beside -té < *tēss (: *teig- ‘go’; cf. GOI §626)), while jōsat can be directly compared with the probable thematic ancestor of OIr. 3 sg. subj. do-gó (< *gōś < *geus-s-t, analogically substituted for *geus-se-t (cf. above)). Similarly, *inksi itself, apart from its generalized zero-grade root-vocalism, can be matched with Ved. nakṣa ‘reach!’ (: naś-); the corresponding subjunctive (-tair < *-kh, -tair < *-kh) is found in YAv. 1 pl. nāśama and Ved. nakṣat. The pattern that emerges is striking:

**sela-subjunctive**
- PIE *ged-e-sel- = do-gó = jōsat
- PIE *geus-si = tog = jōst

**s-emperative**
- PIE *nēk-e-sel- = (talir < *-kh, -tair < *-kh) = nakṣat
- PIE *nēk-si = tair = nakṣi

It is significant that neither PIE *ged- nor *nēk- appears to have formed an s-aorist indicative in the parent language.

An unexpected benefit of the above analysis is that it allows a relatively straightforward explanation for a second set of irregularities. The common verbs do-gni ‘does’ and do-ēcāi ‘sees’ show the anomalous imperatives dēne and dē(i)ce, respectively; apparently starting from these forms, the ending -e has made modest inroads elsewhere (cf. GOI §589). Although dēne and dē(i)ce bear an obvious resemblance to 2 sg. subjunctives, it is questionable whether they are in fact simply subjunctives which have analogically acquired prototonic stress, as suggested by Thurneyssen (ibid.). Why either verb would ever have come to employ its subjunctive in an imperative sense is altogether unclear, since the subjunctive and imperative are ordinarily kept quite distinct in Old Irish. In the case of do-gni, it is difficult to believe that the subjunctive do-gné, -dén(a)e, an analogical creation on the model of the subjunctive of the substantive verb, would have replaced its inherited imperative *dēn(a)j (< *gniēt), while the imperative of the substantive verb was itself preserved as bī (< *biēt). Likewise arguing against a subjunctive origin is the fact that do-ēcāi, like the other compounds of ci- ‘see’, is exclusively deponent in the subjunctive (cf. 2 sg. do-ēcaithēr, do-ēcētēr), and hence would never have had a 2 sg. in -e at any recoverable stage in its history.

The subjunctive of ci- is remarkable not only for its avoidance of the active endings, but also for its irregular inflection in the passive, which is consistently sigmatic when unstressed (cf. òaccastar, do-écastar, etc.). This fact, which almost surely indicates the former presence of a complete s-subjunctive paradigm (cf. GOI §609), has important consequences for the analysis of dē(i)ce and, indirectly, of dēnē. As we have seen, the earlier existence of a subjunctive stem *kéis-s-, parallel to *geus-s-, implies the possibility of an associated imperative *kéis-si, parallel to *geus-si. It is from such a preform that dē(i)ce is in fact most easily derived: the apocope of *-i would have left a pre-Irish sequence *di-en-késs, from which the development to a form in *-e would have been entirely regular. Once established in this way, dē(i)ce could itself have served as the trigger for the creation of dēnē, the innovation being favored by the general parallelism of the verbs -ci and -grí. The fortuitous resemblance of dē(i)ce and dēnē to prototonic subjunctives would then have been a natural point of departure for the occasional introduction of analogical forms such as comainse ‘condemn!’ (< con-nessa).

It thus emerges that our assumption of a Celtic imperative formation in *-si permits a simple and unified account not only of the tair-imperatives, but of dē(i)ce and dēnē as well. The chief consequences of this result, which are by no means trivial, have already been noted in the foregoing discussion. Insofar as the co-occurrence of irregular imperatives with s-subjunctives in Old Irish can be compared historically with the association of s-imperatives and sigmatic aorist subjunctives in Vedic Sanskrit, it is impossible
NOTES

1. Although roots are in general presented in their Common Celtic form, an exception is made for the reflex of PIE *nek- (*h₂nek-), which is given for convenience in its pre-Irish form *ink- (< *enk- < *nek-).

2. The term 'injunctive', as used here, refers to any finite non-indicative verbal form which lacks an overt mood sign. Whether injunctives, as thus defined, differed from their indicative counterparts in some formal feature, such as, e.g., in the presence or absence of the augment, is a question of little importance for the present study.

3. Here too must be included the t-preterite, which Watkins, Celt. Vb. §13, has conclusively shown to be a reflex of the s-aorist. The normal reduplicated s-future (type 3 sg. gígis, gíg 'will pray' < *gī-gíed-s-t) was probably originally thematic: this is the only way to explain the phonology of forms like ebla 'will drive' < *pepplá-sei; where the loss of the -s- indicates that it must once have stood in intervocalic position.

4. The only serious difference is found in the 1 sg. of the absolute flexion, where the s-subjunctive and s-preterite have *-u, while the s-future shows the analogical ending *-sía.

5. Note in this connection that the s-subjectives of roots ending in a velar show the characteristically antevocalic development of the cluster *-k-s- to *-ss- (cf. ást-, resst-, etc.). An original athematic *reg-s-iti would have yielded *rechti, with the same phonological treatment as in the t-preterite.


7. A similar example in Gaetic Avestan is dād. Y. 43. 10 (ı: datōs: 'show').

8. The appearance of *-tug for *-tag, the expected reflex of *tagus, would then have to be explained by analogy. Compare the verbal noun tagu, likewise with *-o- for phonologically regular *-o-.

9. I here follow Thurneysen, GOI §549, in supposing that *-cēc originally inflected according to class B II. Nothing in the discussion below will depend on this assumption.

10. This estimate was arrived at by examining the active B I, B II and B III verbs listed by Thurneysen in §§756-67, together with the originally thematic hiatus verbs do-ga and fo(a)id 'spends the night'. Of the fifty strong verbs thus obtained, thirty-six have attested or securely reconstructible s-subjunctives and fourteen have á-subjunctives. The probability that a verb randomly selected from this sample will have an s-subjunctive is accordingly 36/50; the probability that six randomly selected verbs will have s-subjunctives is (36 x 35 x . . . x 31) (50 x 49 x . . . x 45), or .123. It goes without saying, of course, that this figure is only the grossest approximation: on the one hand, there are more than fifty verbs of the required structure; on the other, not all of these are in fact attested with 2 sg. imperatives at a suitably early date. The case of décle(ce) 'see!', which is discussed below as a possible seventh example of the type under study, is not considered in the above calculation.

11. It is extremely unlikely that the form ber, which is attested fairly frequently beside beir as the 2 sg. imperative of berít (e.g., at ML. 38c 28), is the direct continuant of an apocopated *ber < *ber. Secondary depalatalization is very common in this verb, which also appears as -ber (alongside -beir) in the 3 sg. conjunct (e.g., num-ber ML. 86d 16, as-ber Wb. 10b 13; cf. GOI §554).

12. The stem naks- would seem to have been represented as a present indicative in Indo-Iranian times; cf. Narten, op. cit. 160. The isolated Vedic 3 sg. áskar (RV 10. 11. 7), with generalized zero-grade as in the Irish s-subjunctive ás-, is probably a late and independent innovation; there is no imperative *áforki.

13. So too cumgne 'help!' < con-gni. The form dé(i)ce serves also as the suppletive imperative of ad-of 'sees'.

14. The retention of the long vowel in *-hēas but not *-gōas (cf. tog) probably has its explanation in the fact that the s-enlarged stem of *gēas- was maintained in the subjunctive, where it was regularly shortened to *-gōas- in medial syllables, while *-hēas- was largely eliminated from the subjunctive before its shortening in medial syllables could have any effect on the imperative form.

15. If indeed this form should not rather be connected with the Gaetic Avestan s-aorist subjunctive stēpākt (< stē- *stam-) and taken directly from a s-imperative *kom-ni-stāt-si. It is difficult to draw any conclusions from the peculiar esce ML. 65a 4 §1 intendē, apparently the 2 sg. imperative corresponding to the passive subjunctive as-cēs 44a 4 (< *k(e)id-s-). One possibility would be to take the second -s- in esce as an error triggered by the verbal noun esscī in the following line; the corrected *esce could then be viewed as the regular reflex of an underlying *esk-keid-si.

16. Evidence that the s-imperatives are an inherited formation can be found in other IE traditions as well. I have argued in the forthcoming Studies in Memory of Warren Cowgill that the Tocharian B form puklyus [A pēks'ulas] 'hear!' is best taken as a s-imperative and referred, along with Ved. sgrīti 'id.', to a PIE *kētisi. Other forms which lend readily themselves to an analysis of this kind are Hitt. pahtli 'protect!' (*pehr-, *pehr-s- 'id.') and OPr. teiks 'put!'. The subject will be treated at greater length elsewhere.