

Some aspects of morphophonology of Verbal Nouns in Modern Irish

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The aim of the paper is to weigh the pros and cons for regarding the morphemically conditioned alternation / ɪgʰ ~ i:/ as automatic. The ‘internal sandhi’ in question is observed between the verbal root of some 1st conjugation verbs and their corresponding Verbal Nouns, e. g. *nigh* ‘wash’ ~ *ní*.

Any account of various terminations marking VNs (there are about 20 altogether) must make a distinction between productive desinences, whose attachment is subject to pure grammatical conditioning and unproductive ones, which have fallen into desuetude and whose attachment is regulated by lexical marking, in which case any concomitant alternations are not rule governed and represent fossilised remnants of inert phonological rules (e. g. *dubhaigh* ‘blacken’ ~ *dúchan* or *tuig* ‘understand’ ~ *tuiscent*). In the elsewhere block of regular affixation rules operating on verbal roots we find two rules which apply to verbs belonging to a specific conjugation. The default markers are [W] and [u:] for the first and second conjugation respectively. We will argue that the former rule also subsumes monosyllabic verbs which end in *-igh* and the long vowel [i:] in the VN is a phonological reflex of *-W* attachment to the root, e. g. *nigh* + *W* → *ní*. The palatalised stop [gʰ] is delinked in the intervocalic context, which in turn triggers compensatory lengthening of the preceding vowel.

To support the plausibility of this proposal we show that the process of consonant delinking is attested in Irish (cf. Ó Cuív (1988: 110) or Ó Siadhail (1989: 171–172)). We use alternations of the type VC(V) > VV, which may be viewed as suppression of the intervocalic consonant and subsequent compensatory lengthening (cf. Cyran (1997: 148 – 153)). Other arguments substantiating the claim that the change *-Vgʰ + W* → VV (*nigh* + *W* → *ní*) is not unfounded in Irish come from the formation of genitive forms of feminine adjectives and the formation of the comparative degree of adjectives terminating in *-ach* [AX]. What is more, consonant delinking and vowel lengthening can be observed when the verbs in question are inflected. Only if the desinence begins with a vowel, do we observe compensatory lengthening effects.

Therefore, the alternation *nigh* + *W* → *ní* is regarded as following automatically from the general principles defining phonological structure. On the other hand, an apparently similar change in a set of second conjugation verbs, e. g. *ceasnaigh* ‘complain’ ~ *ceasnaí* is viewed as segment replacement.

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