

**Breton light on the origins of the Old Irish f-future**  
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**1. The subjunctive and future of 'to be' in British Celtic**

1a. present subjunctive:

	ABS	LPBrit.	CONJ	LPBrit.
1sg *bw-ū >>	*bwe-ū-t		*χ-t bwe-ū	
2sg *bw-esi	*bwe-si-t	*bih/*bi > MW bych EMOB bi	*χ-t bwe-s	*beh >> *bih/*bi > MW bych EMOB bi
3sg *bw-eti	*bwe-ti-t		*χ-t bwe-t	*bed >> *bi >> OW OB bi /bi/
1pl *bw-omosi >>	*bwe-mmosi-t		*χ-t bwe-mmos	
2pl *bw-etes(i)	*bwe-tes(i)-t		*χ-t bwe-tes	
3pl *bw-onti >>	*bwe-nti-t		*χ-t bwe-nt	

1b. past subjunctive: only CONJ

\*bwe + imperfect endings > MB MC MW past subjunctive (present conditional) MB *benn, bes, be, bemp, bech, bent* MW *bewn, beut, bei, beym, -, beynt*

1c. present future:

	ABS	LPBrit.	CONJ	LPBrit.
1sg *bibwāsū	*(bi)bwāsū-E	*bə(h)i-ṽ > MW <i>bwyf</i>	*χ-t (bi)bwāsū	*bə(h)i-ṽ > MW <i>bwyf</i>
2sg *bibwāsesi	*(bi)bwāsesi-E		*χ-t (bi)bwāses	
3sg *bibwāseti	*(bi)bwāseti-E	*bə(h)id > OW <i>boit</i> MW 1x <i>boet</i>	*χ-t (bi)bwāset	*bə(h)ed >> *bə(h)id > *bəi > OW <i>boi</i> OB+bo
1pl *bibwāsomosi	*(bi)bwāsomosi-E		*χ-t (bi)bwāsomos	*bə(h)om > MW <i>bom?</i> MB <i>bihomp</i>
2pl *bibwāsetes(i)	*(bi)bwāsetes(i)-E		*χ-t (bi)bwāsetes	*bə(h)ed > MB <i>bihet</i>
3pl *bibwāsoni	*(bi)bwāsoni-E	*bə(h)unt > MW <i>bon(t)?</i>	*χ-t (bi)bwāsoni	*bə(h)unt > MW <i>bon(t)?</i>

1d. past future: only CONJ

\*bwās + imperfect endings > MB past conditional (NB \*bwās- > \*bəh- > SWBrit. \*beh- > bih-; cf. \*brāgant- 'throat' > \*brōyant- > OB place name *Brehant Dincat* gl. guttur receptaculi pugni, MoB *briant* 'windpipe', OCo. *briansen* gl. guttur, MCo. *bryangen* 'throat, windpipe', MW *breuant*)

MB *bihenn, bihes, bihe, byhemp, bihech, bihent*

(beside MB *bisenn, bises, bise* etc., with \*-ss- + imperfect endings = W pluperfect, B past cond)

Proto-British, unlike the later British languages but like Old Irish, distinguished a subjunctive (\**be-*) from a future (\**bə(h)-*). It only did so in the verb 'to be'. Breton preserves a precious trace of this state of affairs: its present conditional was derived from the subjunctive and its past conditional was derived from the future (with other verbs, the past subjunctive was derived from the preterite).

## 2. Present conditional of 'to be': simplex *be-*, compound *-fe-*

Verbal compounds with 'be' in Breton show a voiceless fricative: MB *hoar-ff(h)e* 'happen', *talfe* 'be worth', *t/deurffe* 'be desirable', *aznaffe* 'recognize', *gouff(h)e* 'know'; also *en/he deff(h)e* 3sg. 'have', which is not a compound. What is the origin of *-fe-*?

(2a) *-fe-* < \*-*ve-* + provection by a preceding sound?

E.g. \**gwuð-ve-* 'may know' > *gouffe-*: impossible because \*-*ðv-* regularly becomes MBret. *-zv-* (vbn. *gouzvout*, 3sg. fut. *gouzvezo* 2sg. imp. *gouzuez*), and *-f-* only occurs in the present conditional, which is what needs to be explained.

General problem confronting this explanation: if *-f-* results from provection caused by a lost phoneme + \**v*, that lost phoneme only occurs in the present conditional; it is most unlikely that the present conditional differs from other tenses in what *precedes* the compounded verb 'be'.

(2b) *-fe-* < \*-*ve-* + provection by a following sound?

Start with old subjunctive \**gwuð-ve-* > MB *gouzve-*, then introduce devoicing of *-zv-* from the present conditional (past subjunctive) of the regular verb (*-henn, -hes, -he* etc.; cf. *douque* 'would bear' < \**dug + he*): MB *gouzffe-* > *gouffe-*; hence recent introduction of \*-*h-*  
Cf. present subjunctive MW *bo* 'may be', compounded *gwy-ppo* 'may know', *gwy-ppei* 'would have known', with same analogical devoicing based on the regular verb.

This is the simplest scenario arrived at by 'reconstructing backwards' in time

## 3. Compounds of 'to be' in British Celtic

Cf. Paul Russell, lecture 'Compounds of *bod*: some questions' (History of Welsh, Marburg, March 2009)

(1) preverb + 'to be': MW *han-uot* 'to be (from)', *gor-uot*, *dyoruot* 'to overcome (lit. 'be over')', *kyuaruot* 'to meet' (lit. 'be before together'), *atuot* 'to happen' (lit. 'be at'), *canuot*, *arganuot* 'to perceive' (lit. 'be with (before)'), *daruot* 'waste away; happen' (lit. 'be through, over'), etc. (GMW)

145-7); Breton: lost after OB (*ercentbidi te gl. notabis*, cf. MW *arganuot*; *dadarued* 'happens', *dadaruei* 'happened'; *degureu* 'happens', *dogurbo* 'may happen'; *dianguet* 'you are from' [MB *hambout* 'state of affairs; fate']; *rabed, rebed* 'exists')

NB: W *han-d-wyf* 'I am (from)', *han-byd* 'it will be' (unlenited *-b-*) < 'conjunct' \**sani* + *t* + 'be'

W *han-wyf* 'I am (from)', *han-vu* 'it was' (lenited *b > v*) < 'prototonic/relative' \*(*-t*) *sani-* + 'be'

S. Schumacher, 'Randbemerkungen zu absolut und konjunkt: Mittelkymrisch *hanfot*', P. Anreiter, E. Jerem (eds.), *Studia Celtica et Indogermanica* (Fs. Meid), Budapest 1999, 453-64.

These verbs show forms of 'to be' in all forms of the paradigm

Cf. also MW *pieu* MC *pew* MB *piou* 'own; whose is' < interrogative pronoun + 'be'

(2) verbal stem + 'to be'

MW *gwybod*, MC *gothfos*, MB *gouzvout* 'know'; 'be' appears in the following forms

	MW	MC	MB	
vbn.	+	+	+	B C * <i>gwið-vud</i> W * <i>gwið-bod</i> ([non-]lenition based on type <i>hanuot</i> (1)?)
pres.	-	-	-	PBrit. present is historically preterite (cf. OIr. and 1sg. * <i>gwunn</i> < * <i>windn-a</i> )
imperfect	-	-	-	W B C * <i>gwið-i-</i> + imperfect endings
consuet.pr.pa.	+	+	(+?)	C (B) * <i>gwið-við-</i> (fut.) W * <i>gwið-bið-</i> (B * <i>gwið-við</i> + subj. endings = future, cf. C)
pret.	+	?	-	W * <i>gwið-bu</i> ; C pret. does not exist; MB pret. not attested, MoB <i>goues(y)-</i> = reg. vb.
pluperf.	+	dne	dne	W * <i>gwið-buose-</i>
past fut/cond	dne	+	(+)	C * <i>gwið-bye-</i> ; late MB, MoB based on <i>goues(y)-</i> = reg. vb.; but note MoB, V <i>goui-enn</i> < MB * <i>gouvi(h)enn</i> < * <i>gwið-vi(h)enn</i> (= MC)
subj. pres.	+	+	?	W * <i>gwið-pV-</i> ; MC * <i>gwið-fV-</i> ; MB fut. replaced by <i>gouzuez-</i> (see consuet.).
subj.pa	+	+	+	W * <i>gwið-pe-</i> ; MC MB (cond. pres.) * <i>gwið-fe-</i>
imperat.	+	+	+	W * <i>gwið-bið-</i> , C B * <i>gwið-við-</i>
vb. adj.	dne	+	+	C B * <i>gwið-við-id</i>

The three languages essentially agree in their distribution (with possible exception of preterite, where B agrees with regular verb, which may be secondary; or the preterite did not exist (as in C), and W and B innovated by creating one independently).

Does the distribution make sense? Yes.

- Present is old preterite, imperfect is old pluperfect (cf. MB past conditional = old pluperfect *azyenn* 'I would have gone' < pret. \**aiθ* + *-i-* + imperfect endings).
- So other tenses and moods should originally have been subjunctives, preterites (verbal nouns, imperatives, verbal adjectives ...) of the preterite/pluperfect, which probably did not exist.
- Forms outside the present-imperfect (= preterite-pluperfect) had to be created *ex nihilo*, in this case on the basis of a periphrastic construction of the verbal stem in some form (\**gwið-* + lenition presupposes earlier \**widV-*) plus subjunctives, preterites, etc. of the auxiliary 'to be'.

Other verbs compounded with 'to be':

- MW *adna-bot* MC *aswon-vos* MB *azna-vout* 'know, recognize' < (pres.-imf., itself probably from older preterite) \**ati-wo-gn-* (> LPBr. \**adwoin-* > MW *adwaen-*, MC *aswon-*) and (elsewhere) \**ati-gna-* + 'be' (MB pres.-imf. replaced by \**ati-gna-v-* > *aznau-*, with *-v-* < \**-b-* from 'to be')
- MB *choar-vout*, MC *whar-fos* 'happen', contrast MW (rare) *chweir*, *chweris*, *chwerit* < \**swar-* (unknown etymology)
- B MC *tal-* 'be worth': B simplex 3sg. pres. *tal* 3sg. imf. *talyé*; compounds in all other tenses and moods
- productive in MC: 3sg. fut. *car-uyth* 'will love', *clew-uyth* 'will hear' (vbn. *W clybod* B *klevout*), *guyl-vyth* 'will see' etc.
- productive in B: experiencer and modal verbs (*falvezout* 'be desirable to', *dleout* 'owe, have to', *teurvezout* 'be desirable to') as well as *eme* 'say' Probably sparked off by *gouzvout*, *aznavout* towards modal verbs, and by the type preverb + 'be' (OB *dadarued* MW (*dy*)*daruod* 'happen') towards *choarvout*, *wharfos* 'happen'

So verbal stem + auxiliary 'to be' in British was used to form tenses and moods analytically that did not exist synthetically.

Fits in with the existence of periphrastic perfect and pluperfect forms in the verb 'go' (also 'come, make') in Welsh: MW *ath-wyf* 'has gone' < \**aiθ* 'went' + 1sg. pres. 'am', *ath-oedwn* 'had gone' < \**aiθ* + 1sg. imperf. 'was'.

#### 4. How old is this periphrasis?

Potentially very old: cf. Latin future in *-bō*, *-bis*, *-bit* etc. < \**bhwō*, \**bhwesi*, \**bhweti* (= Celtic subjunctive of 'to be'); Latin imperfect in *-bam*, *-bās*, *-bat* < \**bhwā-* (cf. OIr. 12sg. pret. *bá* 'was, were' < \**bwā-a*, *-as*?)

Potentially very young: periphrasis with 'to be' arose independently in many languages, so may well be trivial.

4.1 'Dereduplication': \**bibwāseti* => PBrit. \**b(w)āset(i)*

Regular development of \**bibwāseti* should be to \**biwāset(i)*: cf. 3sg. preterite \**bu-bw-e* > \**buwe* > OIr. *buí*, *boí*, *baí* 'was', MW *bu* 'was'; 3sg. fut. \**bibwāseti* > pre-OIr. \**biwāset(i)* > OIr. *bieid* 'will be' (NB not dissimilation of \**b-b* > \**b-w*: cf. OIr. *bibdu* 'guilty person' < \**bebud-wüts*)

Replacement of *\*biwāset(i)* by PBrit. *\*b(w)āset(i)* requires an explanation.

stage 1:	simplex	a. main clause-initial	<i>*'biwāheti-t</i>
		b. other	<i>*X (-t) 'biwāhet</i>
	compound with preverb:	c. main clause-initial	<i>*sani-t 'biwāhet</i>
		d. other	<i>*X(-t) 'sani-viwāhet</i>
	compound with verb:	e. main clause-initial	<i>*'wiðV-viwāheti-t</i>
		f. other	<i>*X(-t) 'wiðV-viwāhet</i>

stage 2:  $VC_1VC_1 > VC_1C_1$  where  $C_1$  is a homorganic consonant and both V are unstressed

e.g. *\*'tu-ver-orV > \*'tuverrV > OIr. -tabarr* 'is given'; *\*'að-wēð-et > \*'aðwēðt > OIr. -adbat* 'shows'; 1sg. imperfect *\*-Vmam > \*-Vmm > OIr. -inn*, W *-wn*, C B *-enn* (Schrijver, 'The chronology of the loss of post-posttonic vowels ...', *Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft* 53 (1992) 179-96)

	simplex	a. main clause-initial	<i>*'biwāheti-t</i>
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	compound with verb:	e. main clause-initial	<i>*'wiðV-vwāheti-t</i>
		f. other	<i>*X(-t) 'wiðV-vwāhet</i>

stage 3: unlenited *\*biwāhet(it)* is opposed to lenited *\*vwāhet(it)* => creation of a new unlenited form *\*bwāhet(it)* in Proto-British, which yields the present subjunctive (< future) forms discussed on p. 1

The regular result of *\*bw-* is probably *b-*; but what is the regular result of *\*-vw-*? Perhaps PBrit. *-f-*:

MCo. 3sg. pres. subj. *gothfo* 'may know' (< PBrit. *\*wiðV-'vwāhet*, with syncope of V), past subj. *gothfe*, MB *gou(z)ffe* (< PBrit. *\*wiðV-vwə'he-*, with syncope of V and ə?)

4.2. The Old Irish *f-* future (*léicfeā, léicfe, léicfid* etc. 'will let go' of the basic verb *léicid*)

- Origin problematic, many theories

- For reasons of historical phonology, its morpheme must have been *\*-ifah-e/o-* (*i* and *a* long or short), but what is the origin of *\*-f-*?

- Irish *\*-ifah-e/o-* is formally so similar to PBrit. *\*-Vvwāh-e/o-* of compounds with 'to be' that the similarity can hardly be accidental, hence:

*\*-vw-* > Irish *\*-f-* (NB: only example of this sound development!)

- Consequence: \*-Vvwāh-e/o- may be reconstructed as \*-i-bibw-ās-e/o-, with long or short \*-i-. Reconstruct \*-ī- < pre-Proto-Celtic \*-ī- and/or \*-ē- and it becomes possible to establish that the stem formation of the verb preceding 'be' is the same as in Latin compounds: *faciē-bam*, *monē-bam*, *monē-bo*, *carpē-bam*, etc.
- Consequence: compound forms consisting of verbal stem in \*-ē- and the auxiliary 'to be' exist in Celtic and Italic; the specifically corresponding formations indicate that the formation goes back to Italo-Celtic.

### 5. Methodological considerations

- Contrast      section 2: accounting for MB *be-* vs. *-fe-* by 'reconstructing backward' (simple scenario, no collateral gain)  
                   section 4: accounting for MB *be-* vs. *-fe-* by 'reconstructing forward' (complex scenario, with much collateral gain)

Which one should we select?