Distinctions, foundations, and steps: the metaphors of the grades of comparison in medieval Latin, Irish and Welsh grammatical texts

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ABSTRACT
While the 'grades' of comparison is a familiar term, it is argued in this paper that a more thorough-going appreciation of a metaphor which originally had to do with steps allows us better to understand the development of the terminology of the grades of comparison as it moved from the Latin grammarians, especially Donatus and the commentators on his original work, into the medieval vernacular Irish and Welsh grammars. The architectural basis of the terminology, then, once identified, may help to clarify the use of such terms as Old Irish *etargaire* and how in Welsh *grwndwal* (lit.) 'ground-wall' came to be used of the positive form of the adjective.

Insuper fundamenta lapideis et marmoreis copiis gradationes ab substructione fieri debent

'On top of the foundation, steps should be built up from the substructure with plenty of stone and marble' (Vitruvius, *De architectura*, V.iii.3)

Introduction

Metaphors do not always travel well but they can travel badly in different ways. When words are borrowed from one language to another in a metaphorical sense, the word is no longer being used metaphorically within the borrowing language (unless the basic sense has been borrowed as well), but they can form the basis for new metaphors (Russell 2014, 155–157). Second-language learners can misunderstand metaphors and re-interpret them in more literal ways; this seems to be particularly common with technical terminology which is often a metaphorical extension of more basic usages. Furthermore, in more literary contexts writers and especially poets can deconstruct metaphors and rebuild them in innovative and imaginative ways; in some of the texts discussed in what follows, the interface between poetical discourse and technical discussion may have been a fruitful source of new usage. It is argued here that the terminology of the grades of comparison was understood in some contexts, in this case the Insular Latin commentaries on Donatus and the medieval Irish and Welsh grammatical texts, in its basic architectural and physical sense of steps and stairs, and this insight can help to us to understand how other related terms may have developed.[1]

We may begin by considering the section on comparison in Donatus's *Ars Maior* and then the commentaries on it before seeing how these are reflected in the vernacular grammars from medieval Ireland and Wales; after a brief diversion into Anglo-Saxon England we return to medieval Ireland to reconsider the terminology of comparison.

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[1] For a similar example using anatomical metaphors in grammatical and metrical contexts, see Hayden (2014).

Donatus on grades of comparison

The text and translation of the section on the grades of comparison from Donatus follow, set out in sections (Donatus, *Ars Maior*, II.4 [Holtz 1981, 617.10–619.6 = Keil et al. 1857–1880, iv 374.15–375.12]):

(a) The three grades of comparison; the comparative does not mark feminine gender:

> Conparationis gradus sunt tres, positiuus, conparatiuus, superlatiuus: positiuus, ut fortis; conparatiuus, ut fortior, superlatiuus, ut fortissimus. sed conparatiuus gradus generis est semper communis.

> There are three grades of comparison: positive, comparative, superlative: positive, e.g. *fortis* 'brave'; comparative, e.g. *fortior* 'braver'; superlative, e.g. *fortissimus* 'bravest'. But the comparative grade is always common with regard to gender.

(b) They only relate to nouns (including adjectives) expressing quality or quantity:

> Conparantur autem nomina, quae aut qualitatem significant aut quantitatem. Sed non omnia per omnes gradus eunt.

> Nouns (*sc.* including adjectives) which signify either quality or quantity are subject to comparison. But not all of them run through all the grades.

(c) Expansion of the final sentence of (b): not all nouns (adjectives) use all three grades:

> Aliquando enim positiuus gradus tantum inuenitur, ut mediocris; aliquando positiuus et conparatiuus, ut senex senior; aliquando positiuus et superlatiuus, ut pius piissimus: nam pro secundo gradu magis aduerbium ponimus, ut magis pius; aliquando conparatiuus et superlatiuus, ut ulterior ultimus; aliquando superlatiuus tantum, ut nouissimus.

> For sometimes only the positive grade is found, e.g. *mediocris* 'mediocre'; sometimes the positive and comparative, e.g. *senex senior* 'old, older'; sometimes the positive and superlative, e.g. *pius piissimus* 'devout, most devout'; for in place of the second grade we put the adverb *magis* 'more', e.g. *magis pius* 'more devout'; sometimes the comparative and superlative, e.g. *ulterior ultimus* 'further, furthest'; and sometimes only the superlative, e.g. *nouissimus* 'final'.

(d) Irregular degrees of comparison:

> Extra hanc formam sunt bonus et malus: dicimus enim bonus melior optimus, malus peior pessimus. "*Bonus* 'good' and *malus* 'bad' are outside this pattern: for we say *bonus melior optimus* "good, better, best", *malus peior pessimus* "bad, worse, worst".

(e) Comparison only properly relates to the comparative and superlative:

> Conparatio nominum proprie in conparatiuo et superlatiuo gradu est constituta.
> Nam positiuus perfectus et absolutus est.

> The comparison of nouns only properly lies in the comparative and superlative grades. For the positive is complete and absolute.

(f) One grade can be used in place of another:

Saepe autem conparatiuus gradus praeponitur superlatiuo, ut stultior stultissimo et maior maximo. Saepe idem minus a positiuo significat, quamuis recipiat conparationem, ut *Mare Ponticum dulcius quam cetera*. Saepe idem pro positiuo positus minus significat et nulli conparatur, ut *iam senior, sed cruda deo uiridisque senectus*. Sunt nomina significatione diminutiua, intellectu conparatiua, ut grandiusculus, maiusculus, minusculus.

But often the comparative is preferred to the superlative, e.g. *stultior* 'more foolish' for *stultissimus* 'most stupid', *maior* 'bigger' for *maximus* 'biggest'. Often it signifies something less than the positive although it may undergo comparison, e.g. *mare Ponticum dulcius quam cetera* 'the Black Sea is sweeter than the others', although it is marked as comparative.[2] Often when it is used for a positive it means less, and is compared to nothing, e.g. *iam senior, sed cruda deo uiridisque senectus* 'now old, but a god's old age is hardy and green' (*Aeneid* vi 304). There are nouns which are diminutive in sense, but are understood as comparative, e.g. *grandiusculus* 'rather grown up', *maiusculus* 'rather greater', *minusculus* 'rather smaller'.

(g) use of *magis/minus, maxime/minime* to mark comparatives and superlatives:

Conparatiuo et superlatiuo gradui tam aut minus aut minime aut magis aut maxime adici non oportet: adiciuntur autem positiuo tantum; dicimus enim tam bonus tam malus, minus bonus minus malus, minime bonus minime malus, magis bonus magis malus, maxime bonus maxime malus.

Neither *tam* 'so, as' or *minus* 'less' or *minime* 'least' or *magis* 'more' or *maxime* 'most' can be added to a comparative or superlative; but they are added only to a positive; for we say *tam bonus* 'so good, as good', *tam malus* 'so bad, as bad', *minus bonus* 'less good', *minus malus* 'less bad', *minime bonus* 'least good', *minime malus* 'least bad', *magis bonus* 'more good', *magis malus* 'more bad', *maxime bonus* 'most good', *maxime malus* 'most bad'.

(h) Syntactical details (use of ablative or *quam* with comparatives, etc.):

Conparatiuus gradus ablatiuo casui adiungitur utriusque numeri; sed tunc hoc utimur, cum aliquem uel alieno uel suo generi conparamus, ut 'Hector fortior Diomede' uel 'audacior Troianis fuit'. [Dicimus autem et 'fortior hic quam ille est'].[3] Superlatiuus autem genetiuo tantum plurali adiungitur; sed tunc hoc utimur, cum aliquem suo generi conparamus, ut 'Hector fortissimus Troianorum fuit'. Plerumque superlatiuus pro positiuo ponitur et nulli conparatur, ut Iuppiter optimus maximus. Interdum conparatiuus gradus nominatiuo adiungitur, ut 'doctior hic quam ille [est]'.

The comparative grade is joined to the ablative case in both numbers (*sc.* singular and plural); but we use this when we compare someone to someone of a different gender or of the same gender, e.g. *Hector fortior Diomede* 'Hector is braver than Diomedes' or *audacior Troianis fuit* 'he was braver than the Trojans' [moreover we also say *fortior hic quam ille est* 'this one is braver than that one']. But the superlative is joined to the genitive plural only, but we only use this when we compare someone to someone of its own gender e.g. *Hector fortissimus Troianorum fuit* 'Hector was the bravest of the Trojans'. For the most part the superlative is used instead of the positive and no comparison is being made, e.g. *Iuppiter*

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[2] The quotation is from Sallust, *Histories (fragments)*, iii 85 (probably by way of Servius's commentary on Virgil, i 228). The point is that being 'sweeter than the others' may simply mean it is less bitter; cf. *Anonymus ad Cuimnanum* (Bischoff and Löfstedt 1992, 42.108–43.114). For a similar discussion and the same example in an Irish context, see p. ££ below.
[3] The sentence in square brackets is found in most manuscripts but Holtz (1981, 565) would propose to omit it.

optimus maximus 'Jupiter the best and greatest'. Sometimes the comparative grade is joined with the nominative, e.g. *doctior hic quam ille* [*est*] 'this one is more learned than that one'.

The discussion effectively moves from form, the three grades with examples of the forms, to various kinds of irregularity, and then to syntax. The focus in the last section (h) is on the cases which go with the comparative (ablative) and superlative (genitive). The comparative usage with *quam* is added as something of an afterthought; in a somewhat confusing final sentence it is stated that the comparative can be joined with a nominative even though this ignores the *quam* which triggers that syntactical pattern; this very much appears to be an attempt to squeeze the *quam* pattern into a narrative concerned with case. But before we get to the syntax there are series of diversions through different patterns of formal usage. It is stated that we only have degrees of comparison with *nomina*, literally 'nouns', which express a quality or quantity (b), that is, features which can be graded, namely adjectives, which are subsumed under nouns in Donatian terminology. We then move into the irregularities: first, in (c) not all adjectives have all three degrees of comparison; to judge from the examples, this involves instances where semantically a particular grade is impossible, e.g. *mediocris*; in other instances a grade is simply missing but the gap can be filled with using a form with *magis* or *minus*, a point to which the discussion returns in section (g). In the case of *nouissimus*, the issue is different in that *nouus* 'new' would not admit of gradation but *nouissimus* is used in the different sense of 'final'. At this point (d) the discussion moves naturally into irregular forms like *bonus*, *melior*, *optimus*, where all three degrees are found but they are formally irregular. Section (e) seems to break the pattern of the argument and has the appearance of an insertion; it takes a different turn and seems to contradict the assertion in (a) that there are three degrees of comparison by stating that only the comparative and superlative are properly degrees of comparison, an issue taken up in the Insular commentaries. Section (f) then reverts to irregularity and the issue of one grade being used when we might expect another; the examples quoted (and particularly the example from Virgil) suggest that we have to do with more literary usage. Finally, before turning to syntax, the phrasal comparatives and superlatives are noted in (g). What is worth noting about this section is that another pattern (which turns out to be significant in the commentaries to Donatus) is also smuggled in, namely *tam* 'so, as'; presumably one reason this is included is that, like comparatives, it is used with *quam*, e.g. *tam bonus quam* 'as good as'.

The grades of comparison in the commentaries on Donatus, *Ars Maior*

This is not the place for a detailed introduction to these commentaries (for discussions, see Jeep 1893, 151–156, Holtz 1972, Law 1982, 81–97, Hofman 1993, 116–117). Since we are interested in the influences that such texts might have had on grammatical thinking in medieval Ireland and Wales, the focus in what follows is on a range of commentaries which have been shown to have Insular connections; the following will be drawn upon:

Murethach (Holtz 1977; cf. Holtz 1972)
Sedulius Scottus (Löfstedt 1977b; cf. Holtz 1972)
Ars Laurehamiensis (Löfstedt 1977a; cf. Holtz 1972)
Donatus Ortigraphus (Chittenden 1982)
Anonymus ad Cuimnanum (Bischoff and Löfstedt 1992; cf. Law 1982, 87–90)
Ars Ambrosiana (Löfstedt 1982; cf. Law 1982, 93–97)

Ars Bernensis (Keil 1857–1880, viii 64–142; Law 1982, 74–77)
Quae sunt quae? (Munzi 2004)

How then did they treat the section on grades of comparison? In short, it appears that they developed a range of stances to this section of the *Ars Maior* and it is clear that it provoked some debate; indeed some of the discussion has the air of divergent views proposed and debated around the seminar table. In the following discussion, examples are taken from a range of commentaries as no single commentary provides all the details under discussion; nevertheless the impression is they all draw upon a similar array of arguments about Donatus's text and reflect an intellectual climate where such matters were argued and disagreed about.

Not all the issues raised by this section can be pursued here and the focus of the discussion is on the assertions made in sections (a) and (e) above: the number of the degrees of comparison and the status of the positive grade. While Donatus presents us with three degrees, positive, comparative, and superlative, but later raises doubts about the positive in section (e), for the commentators matters are more complicated; we may take the commentary by Sedulius Scottus as an example:

> Fuerunt qui pauciores gradus uoluerunt comparationis, fuerunt qui plures. Illi qui pauciores, auferebant positiuum, dicentes eum non debere computari inter gradus, quia non comparatur. … Qui uero plures uoluerunt gradus, addebant praelatiuum, taliter eos ordinantes: positiuus ut doctus, praelatiuus ut tam doctus, comparatiuus ut doctior, superlatiuus ut doctissimus (Löfstedt 1977b: 99.7–100.17).

> There were some who wanted fewer grades of comparison, and those who wanted more. Those who wanted fewer would remove the positive, saying that it should not be counted among the grades, because no comparison is going on. … But those who wanted more grades would add the praelative, reckoning them thus: positive, e.g. *doctus* 'learned', praelative, e.g. *tam doctus* 'so learned, as learned', *doctior* 'more learned', *doctissimus* 'most learned'.

Essentially, Sedulius reports a divergence of opinion; some say there are two, some four (and presumably there were also those who were content with three): the former remove the positive on the grounds that it is not a grade of comparison, the latter because they bring in the praelative with the example of *tam doctus* 'so learned, as learned'.[4] The suggestion that there are four degrees may in part be based on the syntax of *tam doctus* with *quam* in the sense of 'as learned as' (paralleling the use of *quam* with comparatives), but it seems likely that in a Celtic-language context the thinking has been influenced by the presence of a morphological 'equative' degree of comparison found in all Celtic languages, e.g. Old Irish *dub* 'black': *duibithir* (with accusative case) 'as black as' (Thurneysen 1946, 232; cf. also Middle Irish *comdub fri* 'as black as'), Middle Welsh *coch* 'red': *cochet a*(*c*) 'as red as' (Evans 1964, 38–39. 41). However interesting though this is, for our purposes it is the attitude of the commentators to the positive degree and the claim that there are only two degrees of comparison which should claim our attention. While Donatus is clear that the positive is *perfectus et absolutus* (perhaps implying that it needs nothing else to complete its sense), at the same time he still seems to regard it as a degree of comparison, but some of the

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[4] For other versions of the same discussion, some of which swap around the order of the comparative and praelative, cf. *Anonymus ad Cuimnianum* (Bischoff and Löfstedt 1992, 40.17–23); Donatus Ortigraphus (Chittenden 1982, 86.579–587); *Ars Ambrosiana* (Löfstedt 1982, 27.6–15); Murethach (Holtz 1977, 71.15–72.88); *Quae sunt quae?* (Munzi 2004, 21).

commentators take a different view. For example, Murethach agrees with Donatus that it comes first but implies that it comes first in the grades (text in capitals is quoted from Donatus):

> NAM POSITIVVS, ut ipse testatur, PERFECTVS ET ABSOLVTVS EST. Perfectus dicitur, quia in proprio statu, ut eum natura primum protulit, manet ... (Holtz 1977, 76.76–81)

> … It is called "perfect", because it remains in the particular state as nature first produced it.

Sedulius, playing on the sense of *positiuus* as a derivative of *ponere* 'put', is more explicit in seeing it as 'placed' first for a reason and that the other grades are formed upon it:

> Positiuus dicitur, quia primus ponitur in comparationis gradus, et idcirco primum locum tenet, quia et a se ipso habet originem et ceteri gradus ab eo formantur et non eget aliquo casu … (Löfstedt 1977b, 100.29–32; cf. also p. 105.22–32).

> The positive is so called, because it is put first in the grades of comparison, and thus takes the first position, because it takes its origin from itself, and the other grades are formed from it, and it does not need another case ...[5]

To support this claim, an analogy is brought into play with the nominative case: … *sicut nominatiuus casus dicitur, ... quia, quamuis ipse non ascendat, alios tamen ascendere facit* (Löfstedt 1977b, 99.13–14) 'just as the nominative case is so called … because, although it does not itself go up, it does however make other (*sc*. cases) go up'. Just as the positive is thought of as the base form, so the nominative is the basis for declension, but the language of ascending seems to be contrary to the implied sense of *casus* 'case, (lit.) falling'. Another commentary, *Anonymus ad Cuimnanum*, phrases this in the more expected terms of falling: *ut nominatiuus casus est, qui est in suo statu: cadunt enim alii; et a possitiuo comparantur alii* ((Bischoff and Löfstedt 1992, 42.102–103) 'just as the nominative is a case which is in its own state: for the others fall; and the other (*sc*. degrees of comparison) are compared from the positive'. The idea of ascending in Sedulius (in contrast to the metaphor of falling elsewhere) may be influenced by the language of the degrees of comparison and intended to strengthen Sedulius's argument for the parallel. A similarly structured argument is also found in Sedulius's commentary to Donatus's *Ars Minor* in relation to the number one: *unus non est numerus, sed ab eo crescunt numeri* (Löfstedt 1977c, 39.90–94) 'one is not a number but numbers grow from it'. The debate over the status of the number one, whether it is itself a number, also occurs in computistic texts, e.g. *De ratione conputandi* where the quotation is attributed to Pseudo-Augustine and strikingly linked to discussion of the grades of comparison, *ad similitudinem in gradibus comparationis* 'just like in the grades of comparison' (Walsh and Ó Cróinín 1988, 120).[6] For our purposes, the point here is that the positive degree of comparison, the nominative case, and the number one can all be seen as starting points for the other related forms which can be built on them, whether the other grades of comparison, the other cases, or the other numbers. The underlying question addressed in these texts is whether they are themselves respectively a degree of comparison, a

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[5] Cf. also *Anonymus ad Cuimnanum* (Bischoff and Löfstedt 1992, 42.100–103); *Ars Ambrosiana* (Löfstedt 1982, 28.38–43); and for the etymology of *positiuus* from *ponere*, Isidore, *Etymologiae* I.vii.27 (Lindsay 1911).

[6] Cf. also *De computo dialogus* (*PL* 90.650); Hrabanus Maurus, *De computo*, II (McCulloch 1979, 207.15–22); this sentence is also quoted in *Sanas Cormaic*, a ninth-century glossary, s.v. *deach* (Meyer 1912, 37 [§447]).

case, or a number. Donatus seems to think so, but the commentators are divided on the matter.

With regard to the *positiuus*, in an etymology traceable to Isidore, it is said of it *primus ponitur ... primum locum tenet*, etc. Now at this point *gradus* seems to be still used in a metaphorical sense, but the references to 'placement' and to it occupying the first 'place' are gradually nudging the reading towards something more physical, as does Sedulius's almost casual reference to *gradus, id est ascensus* 'grades, i.e. stairs' ((Löfstedt 1977b, 99.6) and the description in the *Ars Tatuini* (a grammar associated with the eighth-century Mercian grammarian, and archbishop of Canterbury, Tatwine (Law 1979)) of the positive grade as the *fundamentum*:

> POSITIVUS dictus est eo quod primo ponitur – ceterorum enim fundamentum est – quem et quidam falso gradum esse negant: nam et origo et fundamentum est, quia ab eo ceteri oriuntur gradus (De Marco 1968, 13, ll. 285–288; cf. Law 1982, 64–67).

> The *positiuus* is so called because it is placed first – for it is the foundation of the rest – some people falsely say that it is not a grade (*sc.* of comparison); for it is both the origin and foundation, because the other grades rise up from it.

But it is in the *Ars Ambrosiana* (a text with arguable Irish connections (Law 1982, 93–94)) where the literal physicality of the *gradus* is expressed most clearly:

> 'Gradus' autem naturaliter corporalibus rebus dicitur presis de alterius pressione ut in templo Salomonis unumquodque lignum alteri positum quod de inferiore premitur gradus dicitur. Sic inde his sensibus per similitudinem non propriam presi de altero dicuntur gradus per metaphoram, hoc est ab inanimali ad inanimale; nam conparatiuus de positiuo, superlatiuus de conparatiuo premitur (Löfstedt 1982, 27.20–28.2)

> *Gradus* however naturally refers to physical things which have been pressed by the pressure of something else, just as in the temple of Solomon any piece of timber placed upon another which is stepped on by someone coming up from lower down is called a *gradus* 'step'. Thus, as a result in this sense by an inappropriate similarity *gradus* 'pressed by another' are metaphorically so called, that is, from the inanimate to the inanimate; for the comparative is stepped on from the positive, the superlative from the comparative.

This refers to the fifteen steps between the two sections of the Temple that were linked to the songs of ascent in the Psalms (and thus probably the most well-known set of stairs for a medieval audience), hence perhaps the reference in Sedulius to the *gradus* being *ascensus*. The emphasis in this passage is on ascent, and this may help to explain the difficult explanatory clause *quod de inferiore premitur* which seems to be a laconic way of referring to steps being stepped on by someone coming up from below.[7]

In sum, while Donatus is comfortably working with the metaphor of grades, some of the commentators seem to be putting more weight on the more literal sense of *gradus* as a step and implying that the positive grade is the starting point and the other grades were built upon it. The *Ars Ambrosiana* is the one commentary where this is made explicit and marked out by an allusion to the steps of the temple of Solomon (and implicitly referring to the building of the temple of Solomon): just as walking up the stairs we press down on the step below our feet, so, when the temple was being built,

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[7] I am grateful to Rosalind Love for discussing this passage with me and to an anonymous reader for making further suggestions. For another example of the physicality of the imagery, cf. in the *Ars Bernensis* (Keil 1857–1880, viii 76.30–31): *nam et in scala gradus dicitur etiam infimus, ex quo ascenditur super alios gradus* 'for even on a staircase the bottom step is also called a *gradus* from which one ascends on the other *gradus*'.

the steps were placed one on top of the other.[8] It is argued in the following sections that a more physical reading of *gradus* as 'step' might allow us to rethink how the medieval Irish and Welsh grammarians conceived of the grades of comparison and the metaphors associated with them.

Auraicept na nÉces

When we turn to Ireland and to *Auraicept na nÉces* matters seem to become rather more puzzling. *Auraicept na nÉces* 'The Scholars' Primer' is a vernacular Irish grammatical text which arguably has an eighth-century core but is wrapped around with later commentary. Two versions of the text were edited by Calder (1917) and the core text was edited by the late Anders Ahlqvist (1983).[9] The text dealing with the grades of comparison occurs in one of the more opaque sections:

> Secht n-eatargaire tra dochuisneat .i. a ngrad condeilg lasin Laitneoir is eatargoiri a n-ainm lasin filid. Etargoiri in incoisc i persainn; etargaire n-inchoisc persainni; etargoire persainni i ngnim; etargoire persainne i cessadh. Etargaire derscaigti i nderscugud .i. possit ⅂ comparait ⅂ superlait lasin Laitneoir .i. fothugudh ⅂ forran ⅂ formoladh lasin filidh: maith ⅂ fearr fearrson lasin nGædeal; etargoire meite i mmetughudh; etargoire lughaghthe i lugugud. Etargoire n-inchoisc hi persaind cetumus: unnse (.i. in fer) unnsi (.i. in ben) onnar (.i. in[n] nem): etargoire in inchoisc persainni, me faden, tu faden, he faden, sinni fadesin, sibsi fadesin, siat-som fadesin. Etargaire persainni i ngnim: darignius, darignis, darigne, darignisam, darignesaib, darigensad. Etargaire persainni i cessadh: rom-char-sa, rot-char-su, rocharsom, roinchar-ne, rom-charabair-si, roscarsad.[10] Etargaire derscaigthi i nderscugud .i. maith ⅂ ferr ⅂ ferrsom (.i. lasin nGaedel coitchend a n-ecmais in filed, fothugad immorro la sidhe). Etargaire mete i mmetugud: mor ⅂ moo ⅂ moosom. Etargaire lughaighthi i llugh[ug]udh: bec ⅂ lugum ⅂ lugusomh (Calder 1917, 48–49 (translation adapted); cf. also Ahlqvist 1983, 50).

> There are seven distinctions, then, that is: 'the degree of comparison' according to the Latinist, 'distinction' is the term according to the poet: distinction of deixis in [one] person; distinction of deixis of person; distinction of person in the active; distinction of person in the passive; distinction of surpassing in differentiating, i.e. positive and comparative and superlative according to the Latinist, i.e. foundation, overstepping,[11] excessive praising according to the poet: good and better and best according to the Irishman; distinction of magnitude in magnifying; distinction of diminution in diminishing. Distinction in meaning in one person first: 'behold him', 'behold her', 'behold it'. Distinction of meaning of person, 'I myself', 'thou thyself', 'he himself', 'we ourselves', 'you yourselves', 'they themselves'. Distinction of person in the active, 'I have made', 'thou hast made', 'he has made', 'we have made', 'you have made', 'they have made'. Distinction of person in the passive, 'I am loved', 'thou art loved', 'he is loved', 'we are loved', 'you are loved', 'they are loved'.

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[8] Cf, also II Chron. 9.10–11: *servi Hiram cum servis Salomonis attulerunt ... et ligna thyina, ...: de quibus fecit rex, de lignis scilicet thyinis, gradus in domo Domini* 'The slaves of Hiram along with the slaves of Solomon have brought … logs of sandalwood …: from these the king made, that is, from the logs of sandalwood, the steps in the house of the Lord.'

[9] For discussion of various aspects of this text, see also Hofman (1993, 1996a, 1996b, 2013); Poppe (1995–1997, 1996, 1999, 2002); Hayden (2010, 2011, 2013, 2017).

[10] For the sake of consistency, Calder's text is printed here, but a grammatically more accurate text (where the verb forms are correctly impersonal) is printed in Ahlqvist (1983, 50.7–10: cf. also discussion in 2016) on the basis of a wider range of manuscripts: *Etargaire persainde i césad: no-m·charthar-sa no-t·charthar-su carthair-som no-n·carthar-ni no-bar·carthar-si cartair-som.*

[11] In other texts *forrán* has the sense of 'aggression, assault, stepping into another territory' (*eDIL*, s.v.), a range of senses which fits well with the idea of moving up steps.

> Distinction of difference in differentiating, that is 'good', 'better', 'truly better' (i.e. according to the common Irishman not including the poet; according to him it is foundation). Distinction of magnitude in magnifying, 'big', 'bigger', 'truly bigger'. Distinction of diminution in diminishing, 'small', 'smaller', 'truly smaller' (translation modified from Calder 1917, 48–49).

This passage falls into two parts: the seven *etargaire* (which for the moment will be rendered conventionally as 'distinctions') are set out and then examples of each are listed. This is a less than easily comprehensible arrangement and it requires disentangling. The following rearrangement places the grammatical statements and the examples side by side with the examples printed in italics; the sections relating to the grades of comparison are marked in bold:

> Secht n-eatargaire tra dochuisneat .i. **a ngrad condeilg lasin Laitneoir is eatargoiri a n-ainm lasin filid**.
> (a) Etargoiri in incoisc i persainn: *unnse (.i. in fer) unnsi (.i. in ben) onnar (.i. in nem)*.
> (b) etargaire n-inchoisc persainni: *me faden, tu faden, he faden, sinni fadesin, sibsi fadesin, siat-som fadesin.*
> (c) etargoire persainni i gnim: *darignius, darignis, darigne, darignisam, darignesaib, darigensad.*
> (d) etargoire persainne i cessadh: *rom-char-sa, rot-char-su, rocharsom, roinchar-ne, rom-charabair-si, roscarsad.*[12]
> (e) Etargaire derscaigti i nderscugud .i. **possit ⌐ comparait ⌐ superlait lasin Laitneoir .i. fothugudh ⌐ forran ⌐ formoladh lasin filid**: *.i. maith ⌐ ferr ⌐ ferrsom* (**.i. lasin nGaedel coitchend a n-ecmais in filed, fothugad immorro la sidhe**).
> (f) **etargoire meite i mmetughudh**: *mor ⌐ moo ⌐ moosom.*
> (g) **etargoire lughaghthe i lugugud**: *bec ⌐ lugum ⌐ lugusomh.*

The meaning of *etargaire* is not at all clear: it has been glossed variously as 'inflection' (Calder 1917) or 'distinction' (Ahlqvist 1983, 50, 2016, 107; cf. also Hayden 2017, 100). Text on the grades of comparison appears in the heading and in the last three of the seven 'distinctions' (e–g). The four other items of the seven fall into two pairs; the first dealing with pronominal gender distinctions and the latter with subject and object marking in active and impersonal verbs (in impersonals person is marked by an infixed pronoun [Ahlqvist 2016]). At first sight, this seems to be a very mixed bag but, on the basis of these seven types, *etargaire* could be argued to refer to a category in which markers are added to a basic form to make a series of distinctions. In each case something is added in front of or after the basic form (or in the case of (d) before and after) to distinguish different persons: thus, in (a) pronouns are added to form *unnse* 'behold him': *unnsi* 'behold her', etc[13]; in (b) the emphatic reflexive forms are created by prefixing a personal pronoun to *faden* (sg.) or *fadesin* (pl.), e.g. *me faden* 'I myself': *sinni fadesin* 'we ourselves'; in (c) endings are added to *darign-* to mark the different persons, e.g. *darignius* 'I have made': *darignis* 'you have made'; in (d) pronominal markers are inserted into and added to *ro-car-* (*recte no-carthar-*) to mark different persons of the impersonal, e.g. *nom-charthar-sa* 'I am loved': *not-charthar-su* 'you (sg.) are loved'.[14] The last two cases (c) and (d) have been recently discussed in detail

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[12] See above n. ££ for a more satisfactory text; since this section is not the focus of the discussion, it is left untouched here.

[13] On these, see O'Brien (1932, 162–163); Russell (1999, 203–204, n. 2); and for a suggested etymology, Willi (2002, 240); Schumacher (2004, 381–385).

[14] I print these verbs in their correct grammatical form, as edited by Ahlqvist (1983, 50.7–10).

by Ahlqvist (2016) and need not detain us except to note that some of the verbal forms cited are corrupt and others are Middle Irish which suggests that there may have been a process of updating and modernizing examples.

When we turn to the grades of comparison various observations can be made.[15] First the heading seems to suggest that the whole section is about grades of comparison: *Secht n-eatargaire tra dochuisneat .i. a ngrad condeilg lasin Laitneoir is eatargoiri a n-ainm lasin filid* 'There are seven distinctions, then, that is: "the degree of comparison" according to the Latinist, "distinction" is the term according to the poet'. Again, we seem to be catching echoes of one of those category confusions which the commentators on Donatus also complain about; for example, in Murethach's commentary, while *comparatio* is used for the whole process of comparison and all the grades, it is asked why a derivative *comparatiuus* is used of one of the grades of comparison, the comparative, even though all the grades implicitly involve comparison (Holtz 1977, 72.74–81). This can be compared with a sentence in the *Auraicept* (Calder 1917, 52–53 (ll. 693–697) where the term *condelc* 'comparative' can be used for the whole system of grades of comparison and also for part of it. However, we seem to be dealing with a section where discussion of the grades of comparison is based in part on the Latin texts but has been merged with a different set of categories more concerned with marking distinctions on a basic form. At first sight the analysis seems less effective for the degrees of comparison in (e)–(g) than for the other forms; for the examples do not seem to be working in the same way: in *maith ⌐ ferr ⌐ ferrsom*, *mór ⌐ móo ⌐ móosom*, and *bec ⌐ lugum ⌐ lugusomh* it is not simply a case of taking a basic form and adding markers to it.[16] In part this is because the examples seem again to have been modernized to the Middle Irish forms, but also because the examples selected are irregular. If the examples were taken back to Old Irish they would be even more irregular: *maith ⌐ ferr ⌐ dech*, *mór ⌐ móo ⌐ móam*, *bec ⌐ lugu ⌐ lugam*, but regular examples of the grades of comparison, e.g. Old Irish *bind* 'sweet (e.g. of music)', *bindiu* 'sweeter', *bindem* 'sweetest' (all forms attested) would fit the pattern perfectly well. One possibility, then, is that, just as in the commentaries on Donatus, there were sections on both the regular and irregular grades of comparison and the sections and examples were subsequently merged; originally the examples may have fitted better. It is also possible that the separate parts of the Latin discussion have been collapsed so that what were in origin examples of the irregular comparison became the standard examples. There is no doubt that this is a confusing section but I want to suggest that some aspects of the issue may begin to crystallise if we start from the hypothesis that the grades of comparison originally formed the core of this section and that the other examples are subsequent additions though probably still within the Old Irish period if we accept Ahlqvist's reconstruction of the verbal paradigm in this section (see n. ££ above).

If we then bring in some of the sections of *Auraicept* commentary relating to this passage (Calder 1917, 50–53 (ll. 660–734)), we may begin to make some progress. They are strikingly dominated by discussion of the grades of comparison and only minimally concerned with the other *etargaire*. Furthermore, some of the issues seem to

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[15] Aspects of this passage have been discussed by Thurneysen (1928, 283–284), Ahlqvist (2016, 107); Lambert (2003, 117–118, who suggests that *etargaire* might be seen as corresponding to Latin *differentia*); Hayden (2010, 168–173, 2017, 100–101). All express dissatisfaction with the current state of thinking on this term but only have minor adjustments to suggest.

[16] It is, for example, possible that the use of *-som* was modelled on Latin superlatives in *-issimus*; for an interesting discussion of a similar phenomenon in the Old Irish Milan glosses, see Ó Muircheartaigh (2018).

derive from, or be modelled on, commentaries on Donatus. We may take three examples, all of which can be paralleled by passages from the Donatian commentaries:

(a) the positive as the starting-point for the grades of comparison: this seems clearly reflected in the following: *Cidh ar madh condelg les-[s]ium. Ni ansa. Ar isi as fotha* 'Why would he (*sc.* the Latinist) consider the positive to be a comparison. Not hard. Because it is that which is the foundation' (Calder 1917, 50–53 (ll. 686–688). Again brought into the argument is the positive as the 'foundation (elsewhere *fothugud*).

(b) irregular comparison: in the Latin commentaries these are introduced as a separate section; while it is likely that the discussion in the *Auraicept* is based on this material, the irregular forms are analysed in terms of *son* 'sound' and *cíall* 'sense' (Calder 1917, 52–53 (ll. 697–704)); thus *maith ⁊ ferr ⁊ ferrsom* 'good, better, best' is categorized as *condelg ceilli cen son* 'comparison according to sense but not according to sound'. It is also noted that *condelg suin cen ceill* 'a comparison according to sound but not according to sense' produces nonsense quoting a Latin example, *bonus, bonior, bonimus* (var. *bonis(s)imus*) (which has the air of an example conjured up in a Latin teaching environment).[17] The notion of what counts as 'sense' and 'sound' is interesting; we may note that another Latin example is used as an example of *condelg suin ⁊ ceille immalle* 'a comparison according to both sound and sense together', *magnus, maior, maximus*; what holds this together may well be the continuity of the first syllable *ma-*.

(c) the comparative in place of a positive: this is exemplified by a direct quotation from Donatus, *fogabar dano in comparait cen phosit, ut est, Dulcius est mare Ponticum quam cetera maria* 'the comparative is also found without a positive (*sc.* being implied), e.g. 'the Black Sea is sweeter than the other seas' (Calder 1917, 54–55 (ll. 729–732));[18] here this is described as *étechta* 'improper'.[19]

The proposal here that the section on *etargaire* arose from discussion of the grades of comparison gains added weight from consideration of a later section of *Auraicept na n-Éces* (Calder 1917, 62–65 (translation adapted) where again discussion of *etargaire* is dominated by the comparatives:

> Etargaire d[a]no onni is *etargradimus*[20] .i. foruaslaigeach: etargnaghudh gotha a inne: etardeliugud a airbert. Cate ruidles ⁊ diles ⁊ coitchend ⁊ indles etargaire? Ruidles do etargaire derscighthigi i nderscughud, air is i frecras in condelc. Diles immorro do etargaire inchoisc i persaind, uair is sloinniudh persainni saindredaigi. Coitchend [indles *sic*] immorro dona etargairib ar chena .i. coitchend in uird comairme: indles immorro do neoch dib na frecair condelg.

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[17] For discussion of this section, see Poppe (1996, 60–64); on the question of sound and sense here, cf. Sedulius's commentary on Donatus's *Ars minor* (Löfstedt 1977c, 11.9–16).

[18] See above, p. ££ for discussion of this in a Latin context.

[19] Another related parallel could be the mention of *etargoire meite i mmetughudh; etargoire lughaghthe i lugugud* 'distinction of magnitude in magnifying; distinction of diminution in diminishing' which may be reflecting the section in the commentaries which discuss the fact that sense of comparatives and superlatives need not always involve increase (i.e. 'more …' and 'most …') but also diminution; cf. Sedulius (Löfstedt 1977, 106.42–52, etc.).

[20] Var. *etargreim*; Lambert (2003, 117) suggests reading *etargradiuus*.

Now *etargaire* from *etargradimus*, i.e. annulling (?);[21] interpreting of voice is its meaning; distinguishing is its use. What are peculiar, proper, common and inappropriate of *etargaire*? Peculiar applies to *etargaire* of distinguishing in distinction, for it corresponds to comparison. Proper, however, to *etargaire* of meaning in a person, since it is the denoting of a particular person. Common [and inappropriate *sic*] to the rest of the *etargaire*, that is, common to the order of calculation;[22] inappropriate however to any of them that do not correspond to comparison.

Again this needs some disentangling; the distinctions being made between *coitchend*, *diles*, *ruidles* seem to derive from the distinctions between *communiter, proprie, magis proprie* discussed in Boethius's *In Isagogen Porphyrii Commenta* (as noted by Poppe 1996, 68–69, and discussed by Hayden forthcoming), but for our purposes we may note the pervasive presence of the grades of comparison: *condelg* 'comparison' is that which is 'peculiar' (*ruidles*) to *etargaire*, and tellingly if they do not correspond to comparison (*na frecair condelg*), it is inappropriate (*indles*). In other words, comparison is fundamental to understanding *etargaire*. A final observation about this passage, to which we shall return, is that the commentator thinks that the word *etargaire* derives from Latin though it is not clear from the textual readings which Latin word that is.

To sum up, I would argue that this difficult section on *etargairi* took its starting point from the sections in Donatus and his commentators on the grades of comparison; it also has a similar structure with a core text and commentary. It has been interleaved with other material, but the basic structure to which the additions have been made is discussion of the degrees of comparison, and everything seems to come back round to them.[23] We shall return to *etargaire* in due course, but at this point it may be useful and illuminating to turn to the medieval Welsh vernacular grammars.

Medieval Welsh grammatical texts (*Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid*)

While the chronological and geographical leap to *Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid* 'the Grammars of the Chief Poets' may appear problematic (to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and to Wales), and no one would argue for influence from Irish in this particular case, the point is that similar and illuminating things seem to be going on with the metaphors of grades of comparison, and arguably for the same reasons, namely that the relevant sections are derived ultimately from Donatus.[24]

Gramadegau'r Penceirddiaid survive in two medieval redactions.[25] What is developmentally the earlier version, associated with the name of Einion Offeiriad 'Einion the Priest', is preserved in manuscripts of the late fourteenth century but, it has been argued, derives from an original of the early thirteenth century (Charles-Edwards

[21] Calder's 'gradational' (cf. Lambert 2003, 117, n. 13 'gradatif, ascensionel') is unlikely to be right as *foruaslaigech* cannot be a derivative of *úasal* which has a palatal cluster in syncopated forms; it is more likely to be derived from *for-oslaici*, *fuaslaici* (*eDIL*, s.vv.).
[22] This phrase is unclear (cf. Calder 1917, 216 (l. 3720) *i n-ord comairme*); could it perhaps relate to the connection between the grades of comparison and the analogies of cases and numbers (see above pp. ££)?
[23] We may note in passing that equatives do not appear even in the commentaries to the *Auraicept* (except for one instance in a late manuscript [Hayden 2016, 44–45]); this may provide indirect support for the Latinate basis of the arguments being made.
[24] On the chronological gap, it is worth nothing that Hayden (2016, 44–45) has proposed that Irish grammatical scholia (which were sometimes incorporated into the *Auraicept* commentary in later copies) might date from a similar period. On a possible case of influence in a grammatical context, see Sims-Williams (2011, 324–333).
[25] All the relevant texts have been edited in Williams and Jones (1934). For discussion, see, for example, Parry (1961); Smith (1962–1964); S. Lewis (1967); C. Lewis (1979); Matonis (1981, 1990, 1995).

2016, 160). Preserved in manuscripts of the early fourteenth century, however, is what is developmentally the later version associated with the name of Dafydd Ddu o Hiraddug (Gruffydd 1995a, 1995b for general discussion). The later medieval and early-modern versions of these grammars are not relevant to this discussion. Both of these redactions are similarly structured. They begin with sections on the letters and parts of speech based clearly on Donatus's *Ars Minor*, before moving on to matters of more relevance to poets, the nature of letters and syllables and metrical faults; the latter part of these redactions mainly has to do with metrics, and they end with a set of triads (*trioedd cerdd*) on matters relating to composition and poetical activity (Russell 2016).

The section on grades of comparison from Einion's grammar (taken from the Red Book of Hergest version, *ca* 1400) follows (the sentence on terminology is indicated in bold):[26]

> Deu ry*6 hen*6 heuyt yssyd, hen*6 g*6ann, a hen*6 kadarn. Hen*6 g*6ann yv yr h*6nn ny safo ehunan yn ymadra*6d, val y mae *g*6ynn*, *du*, *doeth*. Hen*6 kadarn y*6 yr h*6nn a safo tr*6yda*6 ehunan yn ymadra*6d, ual y mae *g*6r*, *g*6reic*, *dyn*. Geireu g*6ann a gymerant gymharyeit, a geireu kadarn nys kymerant. Sef y*6 kymrut kymharyeit, m*6yhau neu leihau y synnwyr kyntaf y'r geir. **Teir grad kymharyeit yssyd, possyeit, a chymeryeit. a superleit.** Possyeit y*6 yr h*6nn y bo y synnwyr kyntaf y'r geir ynda*6, val y mae *da*, *drwc*. Kymeryeit y*6 yr h*6nn a v*6yhao neu a leihao synnwyr y possyeit, val y mae *g*6ell*, neu *g*6aeth*. Superleit y*6 yr h*6nn y bo y synnwyr m*6yhaf, neu leihaf ynda*6, ac ny aller drosta*6, ual y mae *goreu oll*, neu *g*6aethaf oll* (Williams and Jones 1934, 4.9–20).

> There are two kinds of nominal, a weak nominal and a strong nominal. A weak nominal is one which cannot stand by itself in a sentence, such as *white*, *black*, *wise*. A strong nominal is one which can stand by itself in a sentence, such as *man*, *woman*, *person*. Weak words admit of comparison, and strong words do not. To admit of comparison is as follows: that the primary sense of the word increases or decreases. **There are three grades of comparison, positive, and comparative, and superlative.** Positive is the one where the word contains the primary sense in it, such as *good*, *bad*. Comparison is the one where the sense of the positive increases or decreases, such as *better* or *worse*. Superlative is the one where the sense is greatest or least in it, and there can be nothing beyond it, such as *best of all* or *worst of all*.

This follows the structure of Donatus very closely, with an adjective designated as a 'weak nominal' (*hen*6 g*6ann*) and only they admit of comparison. The terms for the grades of comparison, *possyeit*, *cymeryeit*, *superleit,* are loanwords from Latin, though it is worth noting in passing that they seem not to derive directly from *positivus*, *comparativus*, and *superlativus*, in which case we might expect them to end in *-iw* or *−i*6*; in this respect they are comparable to the Old Irish forms *possit*, *comparait*, and *superlait*.

Dafydd Ddu's redaction is very similar (taken here from NLW Peniarth 20, *ca* 1320); there is some variation in the choice of examples, but the major difference is in the terms for the grades of comparison (the sentence on terminology is indicated in bold):

> Deu ryw henw ysyd, henw kadarn a henw gwann. Henw kadarn yw hwnn a sauo drwydaw ehun yn ymadrawd, val y mae, *dyn*, ac *eniueil*. Henw gwann yw hwnn ar ny sauo drwydaw ehun yn ymadrawd heb gadarn yn y gynnal, val y mae, *gwann*, *kryf*, *dewr*. Geiryeu gwann a

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[26] Note that in the text that follows the letter *6, which is a distinct letter in many medieval Welsh manuscripts of the later fourteenth century, is to be read as representing /u/ or /w/.

gymerant gymheryeit, a geiryeu kadarn nys kymerant. Sef yw kymrut kymheryeit mwyhau neu leihau y synnwyr kyntaf a vo y'r geir. **Teir grad gymheryeit ysyd, nyt amgen, grwndwalrad, a grad gymharyat, ac vchelrad.** Grwndwalrad yw honn y bo grwndwal synnwyr y geir yndi, sef yw hynny y synnwyr kyntaf y'r geir, val y mae, *da*, *drwc*. Y rad gymharyat yw honn a gymero mwy neu lei o synnwyr arnaw no'r synnwyr kyntaf y'r geir, val y mae, *gwell*, neu *gwaeth*. Vchelrad yw honn y bo y synnwyr vchaf a mwyaf arnei ac ny aller dim dros hynny, val y mae, *goreu oll*, neu *gwaethaf oll* (Williams and Jones 1934, 42.28–42).

There are two kinds of nominal, a weak nominal and a strong nominal. A strong nominal is one which can stand by itself in a sentence, such as *person*, and *animal*. A weak nominal is one which cannot stand by itself in a sentence without a strong one to support it, such as *weak*, *strong*, *brave*. Weak words admit of comparison, and strong words do not. To admit of comparison is as follows: that the primary sense of the word increases or decreases. **There are three grades of comparison, namely, a 'ground-wall' grade, a comparative grade, and a 'high' grade.** A 'ground-wall' grade is one where the 'ground-wall' of the sense of the word is in it, that is to say, the primary sense that the word has, such as *good*, *bad*. A comparative grade is one which admits more or less sense in it than the primary sense which the word has, such as *better* or *worse*. A 'high' grade is one where the highest and greatest sense is in it, and there can be nothing beyond that, such as *best of all* or *worst of all*.

Instead of *possyeit*, *cymyryeit*, and *superleit* we find *grwndwalrad*, *grad gymharyat*, and *vchelrad*, all three consisting of *grad* 'grad' with a qualifier. Most striking is the term for the positive, the 'ground-wall' grade which is then explained by reference to the fact that it contains the basic sense, the 'ground-wall' of the sense, and the grades then are implicitly 'built' upon it and rise up; thus the superlative is the *vchelrad* 'the high grade' where 'the highest and greatest sense is'. The term *grwndwal* is a loanword from Old English, another striking feature in a Welsh grammar of this period. It is attested in Welsh from the late thirteenth century (*GPC* s.v. *grwndwal*) both in the literal sense of foundation, but also in the metaphorical sense of 'basis, starting point', e.g. in a legal text *dysgu tri grwndwal doethineb* 'learning the three bases of wisdom' (Owen 1841, ii 348–349; cf. Parry Owen 2016, 188, n. 20); it is also used in the Middle Welsh translation of the *Elucidarium* (Davies 1995, 77).

The term also occurs in the literal sense in another grammatical context where the metaphors of grammar and building are brought together in a most striking matter. *Gramadeg Gwysanau* is a late fourteenth-century fragment of a grammatical manuscript which was discovered by Ann Parry Owen in Flintshire Record Office (Parry Owen 2016; cf. also 2010). As it survives, the fragment works like the other grammars in linking grammar and orthography with poetical practice, but in this text the term occurs in an extended analogy drawn between a poet fashioning a poem and the work of a master-builder:

Kyntaf peth a dyly prydyd da: gwneuthur y gerd yn divei a medylyaw dychymic da diarfford. Megys y dyly y penssaer kyn dechrev edeilat y ty keissiaw y defnydyev y'r maes oll, a bwrw messur y ty a **gwneuthur y grwndwal y'r ty** yn lle sauo yn gadarn. Odyna y kyppleu a'r breichiev a'r tulathev a'r trostyev.

The first thing that a good poet should do: fashion his poem faultlessly and think of a good and unusual idea. In the same way as the master-builder should, before he starts to build the house, go out to find all his source materials, then measure out the house and lay foundations for the house where it may stand firm. After that [comes] the crucks, the beams, the purlins and the rafters. (*Gramadeg Gwysaney*, ll. 22–26 (Parry Owen 2016, 196 (text), 198 (trans. adapted for clarity); cf. also Parry Owen 2010).

In Welsh verse of the fourteenth century the analogy that can be drawn between poetical activity and the skills of building and carpentry was firmly established and has been well discussed by Morgan Davies (1995, with references to earlier discussion on 68–70); he also draws attention to the medieval rhetorical background to this trope, notably the opening section of Geoffery of Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova* (Davies 1995, 73–77).[27] In that context there is nothing particularly surprising about finding it in *Gramadeg Gwysaney* except that there may be something significant in finding the particular term *grwndwal* in these two texts. It is well known that Dafydd Ddu's version of the *Gramadegau* which is preserved in its earliest extant form in Peniarth 20 almost certainly comes from Valle Crucis, the Cistercian monastery near Llangollen in north-east Wales. Parry Owen (2016, 194–195) has argued that *Gramadeg Gwysaney* comes from the same area and may have shared the same intellectual climate in the fourteenth century. For our purposes it is at least as important to note that both come from an area close to the English border, and perhaps therefore in a context where English loanwards might more easily cross into Welsh.

At this point we might recall Tatwine's description (in eighth-century Anglo-Saxon England) of the positive grade quoted above: *et origo et fundamentum est, quia ab eo ceteri oriuntur gradus* 'it is the origin and foundation, because the other grades rise up from it' (De Marco 1968, 13, ll. 287–288; cf. above p. ££). Tatwine is therefore siding with Donatus against those who would deny that the positive is a grade of comparison; not only is it a grade but it is, in strikingly literal terminology, the origin and foundation, and the other grades rise up from it. We are very much back then in the world of foundations and steps, and the metaphors of architecture. The same line of thinking can also be found in Ælfric's Grammar, where *fundamentum* and related terms are rendered in English as *grundweal*:

   hoc fundamentum þes grundweal (Zupitza 1880, 31.3–4);
   fundo (fundas) ic lecge grundweall (Zupitza 1880, 219.15–220.1).[28]

The term is also used by Ælfric in a more metaphorical sense: *Se craft is eallra boclicra cræfta ordfruma and grundweall* (Zupitza 1880, 289.12–13) 'that art is the beginning and foundation of all literary arts'. While Tatwine and Ælfric date from several centuries earlier than the Welsh grammars containing *grwndwal*, the grammatical context and the geographical location of the Welsh texts suggest that the presence of this term in these texts is more than a coincidence: grammatical texts were being preserved and some of the technical terms at least were crossing over into north-east Wales from England.

The common denominator here seems to be the commentaries and grammars based on Donatus's *Ars Maior* in which metaphors of grades and steps, origins and foundations have been been brought together. Metaphors can run off in different directions, but one starting-point for what has been discussed here seems to be grammar. The link between poetry and building in Welsh verse (now strengthened by the evidence of the Gwysaney fragment) has been seen to its roots in medieval rhetoric and the present discussion raises the further possibility that there might be other influences on this metaphor from grammatical discourse, and the Gwysaney fragment is

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[27] For a comparable discussion of the late-medieval Irish bardic poets' inheritance from Latin rhetorical theory, see Breatnach (2001).

[28] The point of this explanation is to distinguish the first conjugation verb *fundare* 'establish' from the probably more common *fundere* 'pour'.

an excellent illustration of where the metaphors of grammar, poetical composition, and building intersect.

Irish *etargaire*

We may now return to Ireland and to *etargaire*, the one term in this discussion which has so far evaded elucidation. In literary and legal contexts, it has the sense of 'separating, intervening, interfering' where it could be analysed as *etar-* 'between' + *gaire* 'proclamation' with the semantic weight lying on the prefix, and thus as the verbal noun of a putative verb *etar-gair* (Ahlqvist 2016, 107; cf. also Hayden 2010, 168–173, and 2017, 100–101); Lambert (2003, 117) has discussed the minimal evidence for such a compound verb which amounts to one example in O'Davoren's Glossary (Stokes 1904, 202 [item 31]) *arit-gair* which, he proposes, could be emended to produce *etar-gair*. As noted already, Lambert (2003, 116–118) also suggested it might be an attempt to render the Latin term *differentia*, though it never occurs in similar contexts; but his point is well taken that the *Auraicept* is 'une grammaire orientée vers la multiplication des distinguos' (Lambert 2003, 118). As was discussed above, we can more or less establish what we think the term means in the precise context where we find it, but that in effect is an *ad hoc* analysis from the context and it would be good if we could find stronger grounds for thinking that this is what it means.

   It is clear from the non-grammatical attestations in *eDIL* that there was indeed a lexical item *etargaire*. But it is not easy to see how the usage in grammatical texts can be accommodated within its semantic range. Ahlqvist (2016, 107) tentatively suggested that a Latin word might lie behind *etargaire*, a thought he has in common with one of the commentators on the *Auraicept* (p. ££ above), and this may be an idea worth pursuing. In the context of the metaphors of steps and foundations, a relatively rare Latin word is worth considering: Latin *intergerīvus* (also attested as *intergeries* and various corruptions thereof) 'outside wall of a building' (i.e. the thicker wall built on the foundations of the building in contrast to thinner internal walls; these are also the walls against which steps were built). It is not well attested but is found first in an inscription from early imperial Rome: *hic paries communis est intergerivos cum Ilisso …* 'this common wall is shared with Ilissus …' (CIL 29960). Pliny the Elder uses it in its literal architectural sense in the context of building a second floor when the ground-floor walls are not thick enough to bear the weight: *nec intergerivorum ratio patitur* 'nor does the system used for party-walls permit of it' (Pliny NH 35.173). But for Pliny the word was also sufficiently embedded in his lexicon (and that of his readers) for him to use it metaphorically for the seam where two pieces of papyrus are glued together (NH 13.82), and also for the papery walls between the cells of a bees' nest (NH 11.23). One of the clearest explanations is offered in Paulus's epitome of Festus: *intergerivi parietes dicuntur, qui inter confines struuntur, et quasi intergeruntur* 'walls are called *intergerivi* when they are built on the boundary (of a property) and are, as it were, interposed' (Paulus [ex Festo], 110.21). Essentially the term, clearly a technical building term (though it does not appear in Vitruvius), refers to the heavy load-bearing outside walls of a building which would be set on robust foundations (and often on the edges of the owner's land to maximise the size of the building) in contrast to thin, lightweight non-load-bearing internal walls. Where steps to another floor were required, they would need to have been set into the outside walls rather than attached to the flimsy internal ones.[29]

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[29] For discussion, see Meylan (1962). I am also grateful to Ben Russell for help in clarifying the Latin terminology, and explaining how it worked in reality.

The connection with *etargaire* is suggestive. If the *Auraicept* commentator was right in thinking it comes from Latin, then *intergerīvus* would be a good candidate in terms of form and sense. Much of the grammatical terminology in Irish derives in some way from Latin whether in the form of a simple loanword or more often as a calque; for example, case terms are generally calques, e.g. *ainmnid* 'nominative' (*ainm* 'name'), *tobarthaid* 'dative' (*do-beir* 'give') (Ó Cuív 1973, 115; cf. 1965–1966, 154–164; Russell 1990, 89–90). While *inter-* could easily have been calqued by *etar-* 'between', *-gerīvus* would have been more of a challenge, but *-gaire* might have proved a formally acceptable calque whether or not it was felt to be connected with *-gaire* 'calling, proclaiming'. Within the context of metaphors of foundations and steps which seems to have been well established in the grammatical discourse in both medieval Ireland and perhaps to a lesser extent in Wales (perhaps arriving later through influence from England), the extension of the metaphor to the foundational wall (the 'ground-wall' in Old English and Middle Welsh) which both supports the steps and separates the property from the neighbouring one is at least worth thinking about, and fits with how we see *etargaire* being used as a term both for distinguishing separate grammatical features but also for marking features where subdivisions are marked by the addition of extra markers. If so, perhaps we should best think of the sense of *etargaire* as something closer to the 'base-form' which can be further distinguished by the addition of further suffixes, pronouns, or particles; this definition would fit all seven of the *etargaire* listed in the *Auraicept*.[30]

If so, can we establish a plausible route by which such terms reached Ireland? The clue here may rest in the occurrence of the word in the early medieval collections of glosses in Latin and Greek: *intergeries paries* τυχος οδυοκτϲειϲ διορῑζων (to be read as τοῖχος ὁ δύο κτήσεις διορίζων) 'a wall separating two properties' (Goetz and Gundermann 1888, ii 89.57); *intergeriuus mesothicon* (read as μεσότοιχον) (Goetz and Gundermann 1888, ii 523.4). We know that terms from these glossaries, some of which are associated with Martinus Hibernensis, an Irish scholar working in Laon in the late ninth century, were circulating in Ireland and were absorbed into the medieval Irish learned tradition, and especially into glossaries.[31] If so, then we have a possible formal connection by way of metaphor, and a route by which such a term might have reached Ireland.

Conclusion

The terminology of the grades of comparison in Donatus, the commentaries on Donatus, and in the later vernacular grammatical discourse of medieval Ireland and Wales, presents a narrative of metaphorical 'grades' being deconstructed into more literal steps and foundations (and also arguably dividing walls). A plausible context in which the deconstruction of metaphor might occur is where learners of Latin as a second language might acquire the basic sense of a term and apply that in a technical context where the sense is in fact metaphorical because they fail to distinguish the nuance of the literal and metaphorical meaning. The notion of a 'dead metaphor' is often applied to words where the original sense has been lost and the metaphorical usage becomes the conventional and literal sense. This is particularly common in loanwords where the borrowing language takes over a word in a metaphorical sense but, as it were, leaves behind the literal sense (cf. Russell 2014 on Welsh *plant* 'children'). Here it has been argued that

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[30] If this is correct, the entry in *eDIL*, s.v. *etargaire*, may need to be divided into two separate entries.
[31] On recent work on Greek known in Ireland, see, for example, Herren (1988); Russell (2000); Moran (2011, 2012).

the literal sense can sometimes be revived so that *gradus* can be understood literally as 'step' rather than as 'grade'. Another context where literal and metaphorical senses of words can often be in flux is in poetry; and it is possible that the fact that in both Irish and Welsh these vernacular grammars are closely associated with poetical teaching may offer another conduit for the transit of such terminology.

Disclosure statement

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Abbreviations

CIL   *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
eDIL   *The Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language* (www.dil.ie)
PL   *Patrologia Latina*

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