Variation, Change, and the Particular Consequences of a New Sound Law in Old Irish

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It is uncontroversial that Proto-Indo-European *-*nti*# regularly becomes -*t* /d/ in Old Irish, as in *berait* ·*berat* '(they) carry' (< *b^heronti*) and *it* '(they) are' (< *$h_1$senti*). Nevertheless, my principal claim in this talk is that just in the copula, under certain specifiable conditions, the same sequence results instead in -*n*. This idea, together with the notion that there are otherwise 'hidden' copular forms in the language, helps account for hitherto unexplained variation in the interrogative pronoun as well as in the negative of the copula. I will also touch on some morpho-phonological curiosities in the paradigm of the Old Irish copula more generally, including comments on how this verb interacts with personal pronouns.