Connecting the dots: phonologization of redundant tenseness across Welsh dialects

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I propose a reconstruction of the following phonological processes in Welsh:

- North Welsh shows a familiar connection between vowel length and tenseness: [e: o: e/ o/]
- South-West Welsh phonologizes tenseness due to a historical height dissimilation which creates [e: o:]
- South-East Welsh identifies [tense] with [spread glottis] found in consonants, due to phonological interactions between [e: o:]

**South-West Welsh**

In SW Welsh (Awbery 1986, C. Jones & Thorne 1992) long mid vowels can be tense or lax: tense before [±high] vowels, lax before [+high] vowels:

(a) [ˈkʰɔ:d̥ʊχ] ‘(you (pl.)) say’
(b) [ˈɡʰɛlɛd̥] ‘belts’

Preliminary analysis indicates that the alternation is unlikely to be (only) phonetic implementation:

- [e: o:] cannot just result from undershoot: this is the realization in monosyllables.
- [e: o:] in penults seem to be targets.

**South-East Welsh**

Calediad (‘pronunciation’) (Greene 1967): “devoicing” of stops after a stressed vowel:

(a) [ˈɡʰwɛɬɡɪʃ] ‘(you (pl.)) say’
(b) [ˈɡʰwɛɬɡɪʃ] ‘belts’

**Reconstruction**

Provecation is a possible counterexample to the generalization that “tense”/ATR in vowels correlates with voicing in consonants (e. g. Vaux 1996):

- I suggest that provecation is a phonological change, not a phonologization of some phonetic change.
- No recorded dialect with regular provecation, always lexically specific and socially constrained.

**Conclusions**

- Categorical distribution of tenseness and length (as in North Wales) leads to the treatment of tenseness as a phonological feature.
- Phonological change leads to further involvement of tenseness in the phonological computation.
- The phonological conceptualization of this feature depends on what other features it interacts with.

**References**